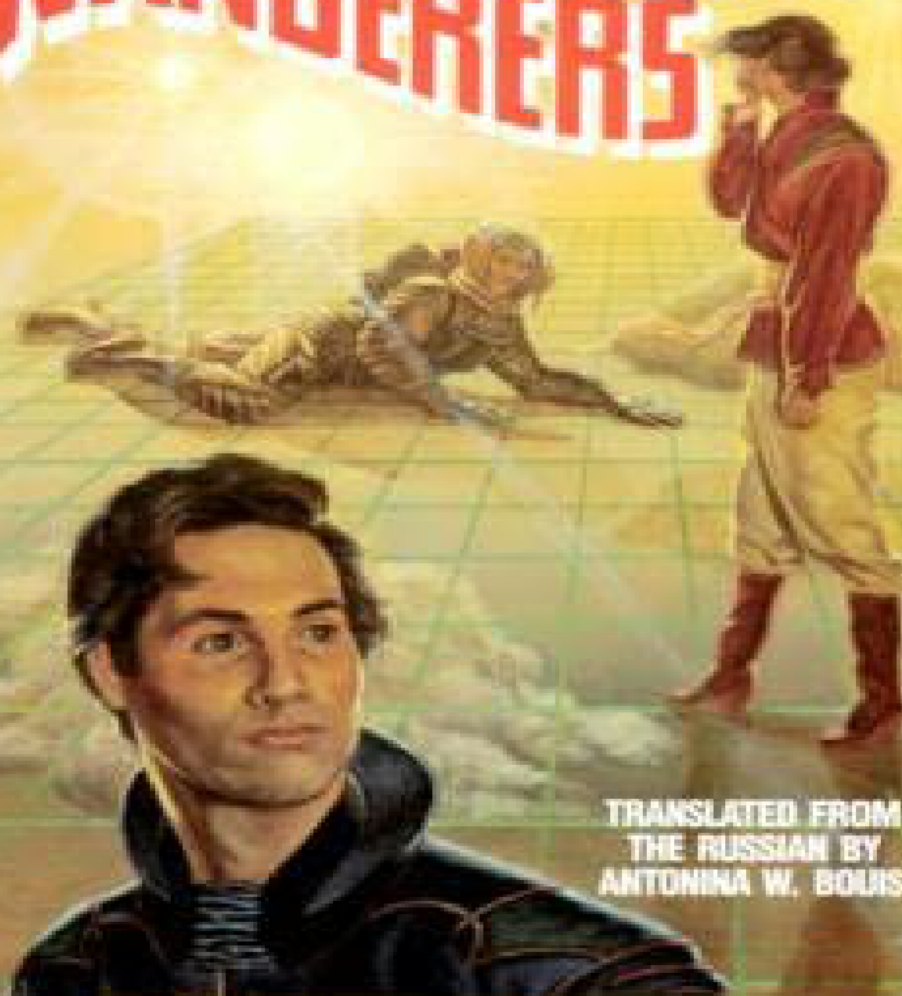


BEST OF
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SCIENCE
FICTION

ARKADY AND BORIS
STRUGATSKY

THE TIME WANDERERS



TRANSLATED FROM
THE RUSSIAN BY
ANTONINA W. BOLIS

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The Time Wanderers

Arkady And Boris Strugatsky

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BACKGROUND: Maxim Kammerer

My name is Maxim Kammerer. I am eighty-nine years old.

Once upon a time, long, long ago, I read an ancient novella that began that way. I remember thinking then that if I ever were to write my memoirs in the future, I would begin in just that way. However, strictly speaking, this present text cannot be considered a memoir, and it should start with a certain letter that I received about a year ago.

Kammerer: You naturally have read the notorious “Five Biographies of the Age”. Please help me to determine who is hiding behind the pseudonyms P. Soroka and E. Braun. I think it will be easier for you than for me.

M. Glumova

13 June 125.

Novgorod

I did not reply to this letter, because I was not able to establish the real names of the authors of “Five Biographies of the Age”. All I did determine was that, as expected, P. Soroka and E. Braun were major contributors to the Luden group at the Institute for the Research of Space History (IRSH).

I had no difficulty in imagining the feelings of Maya Toivovna Glumova as she read the biography of her son as related by P. Soroka and E. Braun. And I realized that I had to speak out. Therefore, I write this memoir.

From the point of view of an unprejudiced and a particularly young reader, I will be describing events that brought me to the end of the era in cosmic self-awareness and opened absolutely new vistas, which had seemed only theoretical previously. I was a witness, a participant in, and in some sense even an initiator of these events, and therefore it is not surprising that the Luden Group has been bombarding me with questions, official and unofficial requests to contribute, and reminders of my civic duty. Originally I had understanding and sympathy for the goals and aims of the Luden group, but I never hid my skepticism about their chances for

success. Besides, it was absolutely clear to me that the materials and information in my personal files could be of no help to the Luden group, and therefore I have continued avoiding participating in their work.

But now, for reasons that are more personal, I have felt a persistent need to gather up and present to the attention of anyone who might be interested everything that is known to me about the early days of the Big Revelation.

I have reread the last paragraph, and I must correct myself. First of all, I am offering far from everything that is known to me, naturally. Some of the material is too special in nature to be presented here. Some names I will not give, out of purely ethical considerations. I will also refrain from mentioning certain specific methods of my work then as head of the Department of Unusual Events (UEs) of the Commission on Control (COMCON-2).

Secondly, the events of the year 99 were not, strictly speaking, the early days of the Big Revelation, but, on the contrary, its last days. I think this is precisely what the Luden group people do not understand, or rather, do not wish to understand, despite all my efforts to convince them. Of course, perhaps I was not insistent enough. I'm not young anymore.

The personality of Toivo Glumov and the Luden group are linked. I can understand why, and therefore I made him the central figure in my memoir.

For whatever reasons I might recall those days and whatever I might remember about those days, Toivo Glumov appears in my mind. I see his thin, always serious young face, his long white lashes, always lowered over his transparent gray eyes, and I hear his apparently intentional slow speech. Once again I feel his silent, helpless, but inexorable pressure, like a wordless cry: "Well, what's the matter with you? Why are you doing nothing? Give me an order!" And, vice versa, no sooner do I remember him for some reason than the "mean dogs of recollection" wake up, as if from a swift kick: all the horror of those days, all the despair of those days, all the impotence of those days — horror, despair, and impotence that I experienced alone, because I had no one with whom to share them.

This memoir is based on documents. As a rule, these are standard

reports made by my inspectors, and some official correspondence, which I cite primarily to re-create the atmosphere of those days. In general, a picky and competent researcher would have no difficulty in noticing that a large number of documents that relate to the case are not in the memoir, while I could have managed without some of the documents that are included. Responding ahead of time to this rebuke, I will note that I selected the materials in accordance with certain principles, which I have no desire nor pressing need to go into.

Further, a significant portion of the text is made up of chapter reconstructions. These chapters are written by me and in fact are reconstructions of scenes and events that I did not witness. The reconstructions were based on oral accounts, tape recordings, and subsequent reminiscences by people who took part in these scenes and events, such as Toivo Glumov's wife, Asya, his colleagues, acquaintances, and so on. I realize that the value of these chapters for the Luden group people is not great, but what can I do? It is greatly significant for me.

Finally, I allowed myself to dilute the information-bearing text of the memoir with personal reminiscences that carry information not so much about the events of those days as about the Maxim Kammerer of those days, at age 58. The behavior of that man in the circumstances depicted seems to me to be of some interest even now...

Having made the final decision to write this memoir, I faced the question: where do I begin? When and what started the Big Revelation?

Strictly speaking, it all began two centuries ago, when in the bevels of Mars they discovered a deserted tunnel city of Amberine. Mat was the first time that the word "Wanderers" was spoken.

That is true. But too general. It could just as easily be said that the Big Revelation began with the Big Bang.

Then perhaps it was fifty years ago? The affair of the "foundlings"? When the problem of the Wanderers took on a tragic aspect, when the vicious rebuking epithet "Sikorski Syndrome" was born and lived through word of mouth? It was the complex of uncontrollable fear of a possible invasion by the Wanderers. That's also true. And much more to the point... But back then I was not

yet head of the UE Department; in fact, it did not even exist. And I am not writing a history of the problem of the Wanderers.

For me it began in May of 93, when I, like all the heads of the UEDs of all the sectors of COMCON-2, received a circular report about the incident on Tisse. (Not on the Tisse River, which flows peacefully through Hungary and the Carpathians, but on the planet Tisse near the star EN-63061, discovered not long before that by the fellows from GSP.) The circular described the incident as a sudden and unexplained madness in all three members of the research party, landing on the plateau (I can't remember the name) two weeks earlier. All three suddenly imagined that they had lost communication with the central base and had lost all communication in general except with the orbiting mother ship, and the mother ship was broadcasting an automatic message that Earth had been destroyed in some cosmic cataclysm, and that the entire population of the Periphery had died out from unexplained epidemics.

I don't remember all the details anymore. Two of the party, I think, tried to commit suicide, and in the end went off into the desert in despair over the hopelessness and total uselessness of further existence. Their commander was a stronger man. He gritted his teeth and forced himself to live — as if humanity had not perished, but only he had suffered an accident and had been cut off forever from his home planet. He later recounted that, on the fourteenth day of this crazed life, someone dressed in white appeared to him and announced that he had honorably passed the first round of the trials and had been accepted as a candidate into the society of Wanderers. On the fifteenth day, the lifeboat came from the mother ship, and the atmosphere was discharged. They found the two men who had gone off into the desert, everyone remained of sound mind, and no one died. Their testimony was consistent down to the tiniest details. For instance, they all reproduced exactly the accent of the automatic machine that allegedly gave the fatal announcement. Subjectively, they perceived the incident as a vivid, unusually authentic-seeming theatrical presentation, in which they had been unexpected and unwitting participants. Deep mentoscopy confirmed their subjective perception and even showed that, in the very depth of their subconscious, none of them suspected that it was merely a

theatrical performance.

As far as I know, my colleagues in the other sectors took this for a rather ordinary UE, an explainable UE, one of the many that constantly occur beyond the Periphery. Everyone was alive and well. Further work in the area of the UE was not necessary; it hadn't been necessary in the first place. No volunteers interested in solving the mystery appeared. The area of the UE was evacuated. The UE was taken into account. In the files.

But I was a student of the late Sikorski! When he was alive, I had often argued with him, both mentally and out loud, when talk turned to the threat to humanity from the outside. But there was one thesis of his that was hard to dispute and I didn't want to argue with it: "We are workers of COMCON-2. We are allowed to be called ignoramuses, mystics, and superstitious fools. There is one thing we are not allowed: to underestimate danger. And if there is suddenly the odor of sulfur in our house, we are simply obliged to assume that a horned devil has appeared somewhere nearby and to take appropriate measures right up to organizing national industrial production of holy water." No sooner did I hear that someone in white was speaking in the name of the Wanderers than I smelled sulfur and grew as agitated as an old warhorse at the sound of bugles.

I made appropriate queries through appropriate channels. Without great surprise, I learned that in the lexicon of instructions, directives, and projected plans of our COMCON-2, the word "Wanderer" does not exist I had been received by the higher-ups and, without the least bit of amazement, I was convinced that as far as our most responsible leaders were concerned, the Progressorist activity of the Wanderers in the system of humanity had been lived through and survived, like a childhood disease. The tragedy of Lev Abalkin and Rudolf Sikorski in some inexplicable manner had somehow cleared the Wanderers forever of suspicion.

The only person in whom my anxiety elicited a flash of sympathy was Athos-Sidorov, the President of my sector and my immediate supervisor. He confirmed with his authority and affixed with his signature my proposed theme: "A Visit from an Old Lady." He allowed me to organize a special group to develop that theme. Actually, he gave me a carte blanche in that area.

And I began by organizing a questionnaire for a number of the most competent specialists in zenosociology. My aim was to create a model (as realistic as possible) of the Progressorist activity of the Wanderers in the system of Earth humanity. Without going into details: I sent all the materials I gathered to the famous science historian and erudite Isaac Bromberg. Now I don't even remember why I did that, since by then Bromberg had not worked in zenology in many years. It must have been because most of the specialists to whom I had turned with my questions had refused to talk seriously with me (the Sikorski Syndrome!), while Bromberg, as everyone knows, "always had a few words to spare," no matter the topic.

Anyway, Dr. L Bromberg sent me his reply, which is now known as the Bromberg Memorandum.

It all began with it.

I'll begin with it, too.

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DOCUMENT 1:

The Bromberg Memorandum

To COMCON-2 Sector Ural-North To Maxim Kammerer Personal and Official

Date: 3 June 94

FROM: I. Bromberg, senior consultant COMCON-1, doctor of historical sciences, laureate of the Herodotus Prize (63, 69, and 72), professor, laureate of the Small Prize — Jan Amos Kamensky Prize(57),doctor of xenopsychology, doctor of sociotopology, acting member of the Academy of Sociology (Europe), corresponding member of the Laboratorium (Academy of Sciences) of Great Tagro, master of the realization of Parsival's abstractions.

THEME: "A Visit from an Old Lady."

CONTENTS: working model of the Progressorist activity of the Wanderers in the system of humanity on earth.

Dear Kammerer!

Please do not take the heading with which I capped this missive as an old man's mockery. I merely wanted to stress that my missive, while completely personal, is at the same time official. I've remembered the cap of your reports from the days when they were tossed on my desk as an argument (rather feeble) by your pathetic Sikorski.

My attitude toward your organization has not changed in the least. I never hid it, and it is certainly well known to you. Nevertheless, I studied with great interest the materials you were kind enough to send me. Thank you. I want to assure you that in this direction of your work (but not only in this direction!) you will find me your most ardent ally and collaborator.

I do not know whether this Is a coincidence, but I received your Compendium of Models just at the moment when I was about to embark on summing up my many years of thinking about the nature of the Wanderers and the inevitability of their collision with the civilization of Earth. Of course, it is my profound belief that

there are no coincidences. Apparently, the time for this question is ripe.

I have neither the time nor the wish to make a detailed criticism of your document. I must note, however, that the models Octopus and Conquistador brought me uncontrollable laughter, with their jokelike primitivism, while the model New Air, despite its appearing to be less than totally trivial, is also devoid of any serious argumentation. Eight models! Eighteen development engineers, among whom are such shining stars as Karibanov, Yasuda, and Mikich! Damn it, you should expect something more significant! Say what you will, Kammerer, but the natural supposition is that you were unable to impress these great masters with your “anxiety over our general unpreparedness in this area.” They simply ducked the issue.

Herein I offer to the pedestal of your attention a brief notation of my future book, which I plan to call “Monocosm: Peak of First Step? Notes on the Evolution of Evolution.” Again, I have neither the time nor inclination to equip my basic positions with detailed argumentation. I can assure you only that each of these positions even today can be argued more exhaustively, so if you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them. (Incidentally, I can’t resist noting that your request for my consultation was perhaps the first and so far only socially useful act by your organization in all the time it has existed.)

And so: Monocosm.

Any intelligence — technological, Rousseauist, or even a heron’s — in the process of evolution first travels the path from the state of maximal separation (savagery, mutual hostility, crude emotions, mistrust) to a state of maximal unification while still retaining individuality (friendliness, high culture of relationships, altruism, disdain for success). This process is governed by biological, biosocial, and specifically social laws. It is well studied and is of interest to us here only insofar as it brings us to the question: what next? Leaving aside the romantic trills of the theory of vertical progress, we have discovered only two real possibilities, differing in principle. On the one hand, a halt, a self-soothing, a turning off, a loss of interest in the physical world. Or entering on the path of evolution of a second order, the path of planned and controlled evolution, the path toward Monocosm.

The synthesis of intelligences is inevitable. It gives an infinite number of new facets to the perception of the world, and this leads to an incredible increase in the quantity, and more importantly, the quality of available information, which in its turn leads to a decrease of suffering to a minimum and an increase in pleasure to a maximum. The concept of “home” will extend to universal scope. (This is probably why that irresponsible and superficial concept of the Wanderers appeared in the first place.) A new metabolism develops, and, as a result, life and health become practically eternal. The age of an individual becomes comparable with the age of cosmic objects — with a total absence of psychic weariness. An individual of the Monocosm does not need creators. He is his own creator and consumer of culture. From a drop of water not only can he re-create the image of the ocean, but the whole world of the creatures that inhabit it, including the reasoning ones — and all this with a constant unsatisfiable sense of hunger.

Every new individual appears as a creation of syntectic art he is created by physiologists, geneticists, engineers, psychologists, estheticians, teachers, and philosophers of Monocosm. This process will definitely take up several Earth decades, and, naturally, is the most engrossing and respected san of activity of the Wanderers. Contemporary humanity does not know of any analog for this kind of art, if one does not count the very rare instances of Great Love.

Create Without Destroying! That is the motto of the Monocosm.

The Monocosm cannot consider its path of development and its *modus vivendi* to be the only true path. Pain and despair elicit pictures of separated minds that had not matured to become part of it. It must wait until reason within the framework of evolution of the first order develops to the state of an all-planet socium. For it is only after that that you can interfere with biostructure, with the aim of preparing the bearer of intelligence to the transformation into the monocosmic organism of a Wanderer. For the intervention of the Wanderers into the fates of separated civilizations can yield nothing worthwhile.

A significant situation: the Progressors of Earth strive to speed up the historical process of creating more developed social structures in suffering civilizations. Thereby, they are preparing new reserves of material for the future work of Monocosm.

We now know of three civilizations that consider themselves happy.

The Leonidians. An extremely ancient civilization (at least three hundred thousand years old, no matter what the late Pak Hin maintained). This is a model of a “slow” civilization; they are frozen in unity with nature.

The Tagorians. A civilization of hypertrophied foresight. Three-fourths of all their strength is directed to studying the harmful consequences that might arise from a discovery, invention, or new technological progress. This civilization seems strange to us only because we cannot understand the interest in avoiding harmful consequences, or how much intellectual and emotional satisfaction it can give. Slowing down progress is as amusing as creating it — it all depends on your starting point and your upbringing. As a result, their only transportation is public; they have no aviation at all, and their communication lines are very well developed.

The third civilization is ours, and now we understand precisely in our lives why the Wanderers must interfere. We are moving. We are moving, and therefore we might make a mistake in the direction of our movement.

Nowadays, no one remembers the “asskickers” who tried to force progress with great enthusiasm among the Tagorians and Leonidians. By now we know that kicking ass in civilizations that are mature in their own way is as meaningless and hopeless as trying to speed up the growth of a tree — an oak, say — by pulling it up by the branches. The Wanderers are not asskickers, and forcing progress is not and could not be their goal. Their aim is the search, the selection, the preparation for communing, and finally to bring individuals mature enough for it into the community of the Monocosm. I do not know by what process the Wanderers make their selection, and that is a shame, because whether we want it or not, we must speak plainly, without euphemisms and scientific jargon. This is what we are talking about.

First: mankind’s stepping onto the path of evolution of the second order means the practical transformation of Homo sapiens into Wanderers.

Second: most likely; far from every Homo sapiens is suitable for such transformation.

Summary: - humanity will be divided into two unequal parts; - humanity will be divided into two unequal parts along parameters unknown to us; - humanity will be divided into two unequal parts along parameters unknown to us, and the smaller part will be forced to surpass the greater half forever; - humanity will be divided into two unequal parts along parameters unknown to us, and the smaller part will be forced to surpass the greater half forever, and this will be done by the will and art of a supercivilization, determinedly alien to humanity.

My dear Kammerer, as a sociopsychological experiment I offer you this situation, not without innovation, for analysis.

Now, when the bases of the Monocosm's Progressorist strategy has become more or less clear to you, you will probably be better able than I to determine the basic direction of a counterstrategy and the tactics for capturing the moments of the Wanderers' activity. It goes without saying that the search, selection, and preparation for communing of matured individuals must be accompanied by phenomena and events accessible to the careful observer. For instance, we can expect the appearance of mass phobias, new messianic teachings, the appearance of people with extraordinary abilities, the unexplained disappearance of people, the sudden — almost as if by witchcraft — development of new talents in people, and so on. I would definitely recommend that you keep your eyes on the Tagorians and Golovans accredited on Earth — their sensitivity to the alien and unknown is significantly higher than ours. (In this sense, you should also watch the behavior of earth animals, especially herd animals and those with rudimentary intellect.)

Naturally, the sphere of your attention should include not only Earth, but the entire solar system, the Periphery, and most of all, the young Periphery.

I wish you luck,

Yours, I. Bromberg

[End of Document 1]

DOCUMENT 2:

Theme: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

To the President of Sector Urals-North

Date: 13 June 94

FROM: M.M. Kammerer, head of UED

THEME: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

CONTENTS: the death of A. Bromberg

President!

Professor Isaac Bromberg died suddenly in the Bezhin Meadow Sanatorium on the morning of June 11 of this year.

We have not found any notes on the Monocosm model or any notes at all on the Wanderers in his personal files. The search continues. The medical certificate on his death is appended.

M. Kammerer

[End of Document 2]

It was in this order that my young probationer, Toivo Glumov, read these documents in early 95, and naturally, these documents made a very definite impression on him, gave him very definite ideas, especially since they supported his most gloomy expectations. The seed fell in fertile soil. He immediately located the medical death certificate and, finding nothing there at all to confirm his suspicions, which seemed so natural, he demanded permission to see me.

I remember that morning well: gray, snowy, with a real blizzard outside my office windows. Perhaps because of the contrast, because my body was here, in the snowy Urals, and my eyes senselessly watched the streams of melting water on the panes, while my mental gaze was on a tropical night above a warm ocean, and a dead naked body bobbed in the phosphorescent foam that rolled up onto the sloping sandy beach. I had just received information from the Center about the third fatal incident on the island of Matuku.

At that moment, Toivo Glumov appeared before me, and I chased away the vision and asked him to sit down and speak.

Without any preamble, he asked me if the investigation of the circumstances of the death of Dr. Bromberg was considered closed.

With a certain amount of surprise, I replied that there had been no investigation, in effect, just as there had not been any special circumstances in the death of the hundred-and-fifty-year-old man.

Then where, in that case, were Dr. Bromberg's notes on the Monocosm?

I explained that there probably had never been any notes. Dr. Bromberg's letter, I had to assume, was an improvisation. Dr. Bromberg had been a brilliant improviser.

Then should he deem it an accident that Dr. Bromberg's letter and the announcement of his death, sent by Maxim Kammerer to the President, were next to each other?

I looked at him, his thin lips set in a determined line, his low brow with a strand of white hair across it, and it was perfectly clear to me. What he wanted to hear from me. "Yes, Toivo, my lad," he wanted to hear. "I think just as you do. Bromberg had guessed much, and the Wanderers got rid of him and stole his precious papers." But naturally, I didn't think anything of the sort and I didn't say anything of the sort to my lad Toivo. Why the documents were next to each other, I didn't know myself. Most likely, it really was by accident. And that's what I told him.

Then he asked me if Bromberg's ideas had gone into practical development.

I replied that the question was being examined. All eight models, proposed by the experts, were very open to criticism. As for Bromberg's ideas, circumstances were not right for a serious attitude toward them.

Then he mustered his courage and asked me straight on if I, Maxim Kammerer, head of the department, intended to take up the development of Bromberg's ideas. And here, finally, I had the opportunity to make him happy. He heard exactly what he wanted to hear.

"Yes, my lad," I said. "That's why I brought you into the department."

He left feeling ecstatic. Neither he nor I had any idea then, of course, that it was at that very moment that he took his first step toward the Big Revelation.

I am a practicing psychologist. When I am dealing with a person, I can say without false modesty that I feel his spiritual state at every moment, the direction of his thoughts, and I'm quite good at predicting his actions. However, if I were asked to explain how I do it, and on top of that asked to draw or explain in words the image - that is created in my mind, I would find myself in a very difficult position. Like every practicing psychologist, I would be forced to turn to analogies from the world of art or literature. I would refer to the characters of Shakespeare, or Strogov, or Michelangelo, or Johann Sourd.

So Toivo Glumov reminded me of the Mexican Rivers. I mean from the oft-anthologized story by Jack London. Twentieth century. Or even nineteenth... I don't remember exactly.

By profession, Toivo Glumov was a Progressor. Specialists told me that he could have been a Progressor of the highest class, a Progressor ace. He had brilliant qualifications. He had wonderful self-control, he was extraordinarily cool, had truly unusually fast reflexes, and was a born actor and master of impersonation. And having worked as a Progressor for over three years, without any apparent reasons he retired and returned to Earth. No sooner had he finished reconditioning than he got on the BVI and learned without any great difficulty that the only organization on our planet that had anything to do with his new aims was COMCON-2.

He appeared before me in December of 94, imbued with icy preparedness to answer questions over and over: why he, such a promising, absolutely healthy, and highly valued man was quitting his job, his mentors, his comrades, destroying carefully worked-out plans, squashing the hopes that had been placed in him... Naturally, I did not ask him anything of the sort. In general, I was not interested in why he did not want to be a Progressor anymore. I was interested in why he suddenly wanted to be a Counter-Progressor, if you can put it that way.

His reply was memorable. He felt hostility for the very concept of Progressorism. If possible, he would not dwell on details. It was just that he, a Progressor, had negative feelings about Progressorism.

And over there (he jerked his thumb over his shoulder), he had a very trivial thought: while he was tramping along the cobblestones of Arkanara's squares, shaking his staff and brandishing his sword, here (he pointed his index finger at the ground beneath his feet) some trickster in a fashionable rainbow cape and a metavisor over his shoulder was strolling on Sverdlov Square. As far as he knew, that simple thought rarely occurs to anyone, and if it does, then as an incongruously silly or romantic one. But he, Toivo Glumov, had no peace from that thought: no gods should be allowed to intervene in our affairs; the gods had no place on earth, for "the good of the gods is the wind — it fills sails, but it also raises storms." (I later found the source of this citation with great difficulty — it's from Verbliben.)

My naked eye could see that before me was a Catholic who was far more Catholic than the Pope. Without further discussion, I took him into my group and started him in on the theme "A Visit from an Old Lady."

He turned out to be a marvelous worker. He was energetic, he had initiative, he did not know the meaning of tired, and — this was a very rare quality at his age — he was not disappointed by failure. There were no negative results for him. Moreover, negative results of his research made him just as happy as the rare positive ones. He had seemed to set his mind from the beginning that nothing definite would be learned in his lifetime, and know how to find pleasure in the actual (often rather dreary) procedure of analyzing the least-bit-suspicious incident. Amazingly, my old workers - Grisha Serosovin, Sandro Mbvevari, Andryusha Kikin, and others - shaped up around him, stopped wasting time, and grew much less ironic and much more efficient. And it wasn't as if they were following his example, there could be no question of that; he was too young for them, too green. But he seemed to have infected them with his seriousness, his concentration on the work, and, most of all, I think, they were astonished by the intense hatred for the object of our work that they could guess in him and which they totally lacked. Once, I happened to mention the tanned youth Rivera around Grisha Serosovin and soon discovered that they had all located and reread that story by Jack London.

Like Rivera, Toivo had no friends. He was surrounded by faithful and trusty colleagues, and he was a faithful and trusty partner

himself for any undertaking. But he never did develop friends. I think it was because it was too hard to be his friend: he never was satisfied with himself in anything, and therefore never made allowances for others in anything. He had this ruthless concentration on his goal, which I had seen before only in major scientists and athletes. No room for friendship...

Actually, he did have one friend. I mean his wife, Asya Stasova, name and patronymic Anastasiya Pavlovna. When I met her, she was a charming little woman, as lively as mercury, sharp-tongued, and with a tendency to make quick judgments. Therefore, the atmosphere in their house was always combat-ready, and it was sheer pleasure to observe their constantly erupting verbal battles.

It was all the more amazing because in ordinary circumstances — that is, at work — Toivo gave the impression of being a slow and taciturn man. He seemed to be always stuck on some important idea he was thinking over carefully. But not with Asya. Only not with Asya. With her he was Demosthenes, Cicero, Apostle Paul; he intoned, quipped, created maxims — damn it, he even ironized! It was difficult to imagine just how different the two men were; silent, slow Toivo Glumov-at-Work and animated, chatty, philosophizing, constantly erring and agitatedly defending his errors Toivo Glumov-at-Home. At home, he even ate with an appetite and with taste. He even complained about the food. Asya worked as a gastronomic degustator and did all the cooking herself. That's the way it had been in her mother's home, and in her grandmother's home. This tradition, which delighted Toivo Glumov, went back in the Stasov family to the depths of centuries, to those unimaginable times before molecular cuisine, when an ordinary hamburger had to be cooked by means of very complicated and not very appetizing procedures...

And Toivo also had a mother. Every day, no matter how busy or where he was, he always found a minute to call her on the videochannel and exchange at least a few words. They called that their “check-in call” Many years ago, I met Maya Toivovna Glumova, but the circumstances of our meeting were so sad that subsequently we never met again. Not through any fault of mine. No one's fault, really. In brief, she had a very bad opinion of me, and Toivo knew it. He never spoke of her with me. But he spoke with her about me frequently — I learned that much later...

This duality undoubtedly irritated and depressed him. I don't think that Maya Toivovna said bad things about me. It is completely improbable that she would have told him the terrible story of Lev Abalkin's death. Most likely, whenever Tolvo brought up the subject of Kammerer, she simply coldly refused to speak on that topic. But that was more than enough.

For I was more than a boss for Toivo. After all, I was the only person who shared his views, the only person in the enormous COMCON-2 who treated the issue that engrossed him totally with complete seriousness and without any allowances. Besides which, he felt great piety toward me. Say what you will, but his boss was the legendary Marc Sim! Toivo hadn't even been born when Mare Sim was blowing up ray towers and fighting fascists on Saraksha... The peerless White Queen! The organizer of Operation Virus, after which Excellency himself called him Big Bug! Toivo was just a schoolboy when Big Bug penetrated into the Island Empire, into the very capital... the first earthling, and the last, incidentally... Of course, these were all exploits of a Progressor, but it is written: a Progressor can be vanquished only by another Progressor! And Toivo was a fierce adherent of that simple idea.

And then there was also this: Toivo had no idea how he would act when at last the intervention of the Wanderers in human affairs would be established and proven with absolute reliability. No historical analogies from the centuries of activity by Earth Progressors helped there. For the Duke of Irukan, an exposed Earth Progressor was a demon or a practicing sorcerer. For counterintelligence from the Island Empire, the same Progressor was a clever spy from the mainland. And what was an exposed Progressor Wanderer from the point of view of a worker in COMCON-2?

An exposed sorcerer would be burned; or he could be placed in a stone sack and forced to make gold from his own feces. A clever spy from the mainland should be rerecruited or killed. But what do you do with an exposed Wanderer?

Toivo did not know the answer to these and similar questions. The majority felt these questions were incorrect. "What do you do if your outboard motor catches the beard of a watersprite? Do you untangle him? Cut it ruthlessly? Pull the watersprite up by the sides?" Toivo did not discuss these things with me. And I think that

he didn't because he had convinced himself that Big Bug, the legendary White Queen, the clever Marc Sim had long ago thought it out, had analyzed all the possible variants, had compiled detailed plans and had them confirmed by the authorities.

I did not disillusion him. For the time being.

I must say that Toivo Glumov was a man of prejudices. (How else, with his fanaticism?) For instance, he refused to acknowledge the ties between his theme, "A Visit from an Old Lady," and the Rip Van Winkle theme that had been worked out a long time ago in our department. The incidents of sudden and completely unexplained disappearances of people in the Seventies and Eighties and their just as sudden and unexplained return was the only part of the Bromberg Memorandum that Toivo steadfastly refused to examine or even to take into account. "That's a typo," he maintained. "Or we don't understand him properly. Why would the Wanderers need people to disappear inexplicably!" And this despite the fact that Bromberg's Memorandum had become his catechism, the program for his work for the rest of his life... Apparently, he was unwilling and unable to endow the Wanderers with almost supernatural powers. Such an admission would have made his work valueless. Really, what would be the point of researching, seeking, trying to catch a creature that was capable at any moment of disintegrating in the air and restructuring itself in some other place?

But for all his tendency toward prejudices, he never tried to argue with established facts. I remember when he was just a green neophyte and he convinced me to join in the investigation of the tragedy on the island of Matuku.

The affair was in the jurisdiction of the Oceania sector, naturally, where they didn't even want to hear the word Wanderer. But this was a unique case, with no precedents in the past (I sincerely hope that nothing like this will occur in the future), and Toivo and I were accepted without demur.

Since time immemorial, an ancient, half-crumbled radio telescope has stood on the island of Matuku. It has never been established who built it or why.

The island was considered uninhabited; it was visited only by herds of dolphins and random couples seeking pearls in the translucent bays of the north shore. However, as we soon learned,

for the last several years a doubled family of Golovans had been living there. (Today's generation had started forgetting what Golovans are. A reminder: they are a race of rational Canoids from the planet Saraksh, who for a time were in very close contact with earthlings. These large-headed talking dogs readily accompanied us throughout space and even had something like a diplomatic embassy on our planet. About thirty years ago, they left us and did not enter into contact with humans anymore.)

On the south of the island, there was a round volcanic harbor. It was indescribably dirty: the beach was polluted by some disgusting foam. It looked like the filth was organic in origin because it attracted innumerable flocks of sea birds. Of course, the waters of the harbors were lifeless. Even seaweed grew unwillingly.

Murders were taking place on that island. People were killing people, and it was so horrible that no one would lift his hand for several months to report these events through the mass media.

It soon became apparent that the fault, or rather, the cause of it all was a giant Silurian mollusk, a monstrous primeval cephalopod that had settled some time ago on the bottom of the volcanic harbor. It must have been swept into there by a typhoon. The biofield of this monster, which floated up to the surface from time to time, had a depressive effect on the psyche of higher animals. In particular, it elicited a catastrophic lowering of the level of motivation in humans. In that biofield man became asocial; he could kill an acquaintance who accidentally dropped his shirt into the water. And he did.

And so Toivo Glumov got it into his head that this mollusk was the individual of the Monocosm, as predicted by Bromberg, in the process of creation. I must confess that, in the beginning, when there weren't any facts at all, his theories seemed rather convincing (if you can speak of convincing logic built on a fantastic supposition). And you had to see him retreat step by step under the onslaught of new data, which daily were obtained by shocked specialists in cephalopods and paleontology...

He was finished off by a biology student who dug up in Tokyo a thirteenth-century Japanese manuscript that contained a description of this or a similar monster (I quote from my diary): "In the Eastern seas is seen a katatsumorikado of purple color with many long thin

arms. It sticks out of its round shell of thirty feet in size with pens and centilia, its eye seems rotten, and the whole thing is covered with polyps. When it surfaces, it lies on the water flat like an island, spreading a foul odor and defecating white, to lure fish and birds. When they gather, it grabs them with its arms indiscriminately and feeds on them. On moonlit nights it lies, bobbing in the eaves, staring into the low sky and thinking about the deep waters from where it was disgorged. These thoughts are so gloomy that they horrify men, and they become like tigers.”

I remember how Toivo read this and then was silent for several minutes, and then sighed — it seemed to me with relief — and said: “Yes. That’s not it. And a good thing, because it’s too vile.” According to his lights, the Monocosm had to be a totally disgusting creature, but not that bad. The Monocosm in the form of a Silurian octopus — with its poisonous biofield, its extensible shell, and its personal age of over four hundred million years — did not lit into any concepts of the specialists.

Thus the first serious affair that Toivo Glumov took on came to naught. He had quite a few such zeros later; and in the middle of the year 98 he asked permission to do some work on the materials on mass phobias. I gave permission.

DOCUMENT 3:

A Report from T. Glumov

REPORT COMCON-2 No. 011/99 Urals-North

Date: 20 March 99 FROM: T. Glumov, Inspector

THEME: 009 "A Visit from an Old Lady"

CONTENTS: Cosmophobia, "The Penguin Syndrome"

In analyzing the incidents of cosmic phobias in the last hundred years, I've come to the conclusion that, within the parameters of theme 009, the materials from the so-called Penguin Syndrome could be of interest to us.

Sources: A. Mobius, paper at the XIV Conference of Cosmopsychologist Riga, 84

A. Mobius, "The Penguin Syndrome," PCP (Problems of Cosmic Psychology), 42, 84

A. Mobius, "More on the Nature of the Penguin Syndrome," PCP, 44, 85

Reference:

Mobius, Asmodeus-Matvei, doctor of medicine, corresponding member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Europe, director of the branch of the World Institute of Cosmic Psychopathology (Vienna). Born 26/04/36, Innsbruck. Education: Psychopathology Department, Sorbonne; Second Institute of Space Medicine, Moscow; Higher Courses of Equipment-free Aquanautics, Honolulu. Basic areas of scientific interest: non-industrial space and aquaphobias. From 81 to 91, deputy chairman of the Main Medical Commission of the Directorate of the Space Fleet. Now generally recognized founder and head of the school known as Polymorphous cosmopsychopathology.

On October 7, 84, at a conference of cosmopsychologists in Riga, Dr. Asmodeus Mobius reported on a new type of space phobia, which he called the Penguin Syndrome. This phobia was a non-dangerous psychic deviation, expressed in persistent nightmares

that came to the patient in his sleep. No sooner does the patient fall asleep than he discovers himself hanging in airless space, absolutely helpless and weak, alone and abandoned, given up to the whims of soulless and potent powers. He physically feels the suffocation: he feels his being burned by destructive rays, his bones thinning and melting, his brain boiling and evaporating, an incredible intense despair overwhelms him, and he wakes up.

Dr. Mobius did not consider this disease dangerous because, first of all, it is not accompanied by any psychic damage, and secondly, it responds successfully to ambulatory psychotherapy. The Penguin Syndrome attracted the attention of Dr. Mobius primarily because it is a completely new phenomenon, never before described by anyone. It was amazing that this disease struck people irrespective of sex, age, and profession, and no less amazing was the fact that there was no connection between the syndrome and gene index of the patient.

Interested in the etiology of the phenomenon, Dr. Mobius subjected the material he gathered (close to twelve hundred cases) to a multifactor analysis on eighteen parameters and to his satisfaction discovered that in 78 percent of the incidents, the syndrome arose in people who had made long-distance space flights on the Phantom-17-Penguin Spaceship. "I had expected something like that," Dr. Mobius announced. "In my memory this is not the first time that construction engineers have offered us technology that has not been sufficiently tested. That is why I called the syndrome I discovered after the type of ship, and let that be a lesson and warning."

On the basis of Dr. Mobius's speech, the conference in Riga passed a resolution to ban the use of spaceships of the Phantom-17-Penguin type until all the construction flaws creating the phobia had been repaired.

1. I determined that the Phantom-17-Penguins spaceship had been subjected to the most thorough diagnostics, in the course of which nothing major in the construction was discovered, so that the direct cause of the Penguin Syndrome has remained shrouded in mist and fog. (However, wanting to reduce the risk to zero, the Directorate of the Space Fleet removed the Penguins from passenger flights and redesigned them for autopilot.) The incidence of the Penguin Syndrome rapidly decreased, and as far as I know, the last

case was recorded thirteen years ago.

However, I was not satisfied. I was worried by the 22 percent of the cases reviewed whose relationship with the Phantom-17-Penguin spaceship remained vague. Of those 22 percent, according to the figures of Dr. Mobius, 7 percent never had anything to do with the Penguins, and the remaining 15 percent could not say anything useful either they did not remember or they were not interested in spaceship models and did not know which ones they had flown in.

Naturally, the statistical significance of the hypothesis of the role of the Penguins in the appearance of the phobia is indisputable. However, 22 percent is not a small figure. I subjected Mobius's materials to a multifactored analysis of twenty additional parameters, and selected these parameters, I confess, rather randomly, having nothing to work from, not the most dubious hypothesis. For instance, I had parameter dates of takeoff accurate to within the month, place of birth accurate to the region, hobbies with accuracy to within the class rating... and so on.

It turned out to be quite simple, however, and it was only humanity's eternal belief in the isotropism of the universe that kept Dr. Mobius from discovering what I managed to come up with. Here is what I learned: the Penguin Syndrome affected people who had made space flights on the routes to Saula, Redut, and Cassandra — in other words, through subspace sector entry 41/02.

The Phantom-17-Penguin had nothing to do with it. It was simply that the overwhelming majority of those ships in those days (the early 80s) went straight from the hangar to the Earth-Cassandra-Zephyr and Earth-Redut-EN-2105 routes. That explained Dr. Mobius's 78 percent. As for the remaining 22 percent, 20 had flown on those routes in other ships; that left only 2 percent, who had never flown anywhere, and so did not play a significant role.

2. The data of Dr. Mobius is definitely incomplete. In the names he collected as well the data from the archives of the Directorate of the Space Fleet, I was able to determine that during the period in question 4,512 people traveled along those routes in both directions, of which 183 people (primarily crew members) made round trips several times. More than two-thirds of the reference group did not fall into Dr. Mobius's field of vision.

The most likely conclusion is that they were immune to the Penguin Syndrome or that for various reasons they did not seek medical help. In connection with this, it seemed extremely important for me to determine: - whether there were people within the reference group who were immune to the syndrome; and - if there were any, then could the causes of their immunity be determined, or at least the biosociopsychological parameters in which these people differed from the patients.

With these questions, I turned to Dr. Mobius himself. He replied that this problem had never interested him, but intuitively he tended to assume that the existence of such biosociopsychological parameters seemed highly unlikely. In response to my request, he agreed to assign this research to one of his tabs, warning me that I should not expect results before two or three months.

So as not to lose time, I turned to the files of the Directorate's Medical Center and tried to analyze the data on all 124 pilots who made regular round trips on the routes in question during the period in question.

Elementary analysis showed that, at least for the pilots, the probability of being subjected to an attack of the Penguin Syndrome was approximately one-third and did not depend on the number of flights through the "dangerous" sector. Thus, it becomes quite probable that (a) two-thirds of people are immune to the Penguin Syndrome, and (b) a person without immunity is stricken by the syndrome with a probability close to one. That is why the question of distinguishing the immune person from the non-immune takes on such interest.

3. I feel it necessary to cite in full the notes by Dr. Mobius to his article, "More on the Nature of the Penguin Syndrome." Dr. Mobius writes:

"I received a curious missive from my colleague Krivoklykov (of the Crimean branch of the Second ISM). After my speech in Riga was published, he wrote that for many months he has been having dreams that are incredibly similar to the nightmares of the sufferers of the Penguin Syndrome — he feels suspended in airless space far from planets and stars, he does not feel his body but sees it, just as many space objects, real and fantastic. But as opposed to those with the Penguin Syndrome, he does not feel any negative emotions. On

the contrary, the event seems interesting and pleasant. He imagines that he is an independent heavenly body, moving along a trajectory he has chosen. The movement itself gives him pleasure, for he moves toward a certain goal that promises much that is interesting. The view of stellar masses glittering in the abyss elicits feelings of inexplicable rapture, and so on. It occurred to me that in the person of my colleague Krivoklykov I have an incident of a certain inversion of the Penguin Syndrome, which would be of great theoretical interest in light of the considerations I have explicated in my article. However, I was disappointed: it turned out that Krivoklykov had never in his life flown in a Phantom-17-Penguin starship. However, I do not give up hope that the inversion of the Penguin Syndrome does exist as a psychic phenomenon, and I will be grateful to any physician who would be kind enough to send me new data on that subject.”

Reference:

Krivoklykov, Ivan Georgievich, replacement physician and psychiatrist of Lemba base (EN 2105), in the period in question had made several trips on the Earth-Redut-EN-2105 route on various spaceships. According to the data In BVI, at the present time he is on Lemba case.

In the course of personal conversation with Dr. Mobius, I learned that in the last few years he has discovered the “positive” inversion of the Penguin Syndrome in another two people. Our of medical ethic, he refused to divulge their names.

I am not attempting a detailed commentary on the inversion of the Penguin Syndrome. However, it seems clear to me that there should be significantly more such people than are now known.

T. Glumov

[End of Document 3.]

I presented Document 3 here not only because it was one of the most summarizing reports made by Toivo Glumov. As I read and reread it, I sensed that we had finally come across the first real clue then, even though at the time that had not occurred to me, that the chain of events that would play the decisive role in my part in the Big Revelation began with that report.

On March 21, I read Toivo Glumov’s report on the Penguin

Syndrome.

On March 25, the Wizard presented his demonstration in the Institute of Eccentrics. (I learned about it only several days later.)

And on March 27, Toivo turned in his report on fukamiphobia.

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DOCUMENT 4:

Report by T. Glumov Theme 009

Date: 26 March 99

FROM: T. Glumov, Inspector

THEME: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

CONTENTS: Fukamiphobia, the history of the Amendment to the Law on Mandatory Bioblockade

In analyzing the incidents of mass phobias in the last one hundred years, I have come to the conclusion that within the parameters of theme 009, the events that preceded the passage on 2/02/65 by the World Council of the famous Amendment to the law on the Bioblockade would be of interest to us.

The following should be kept in mind:

1. Bioblockade, also known as the Tokyo Procedure, has been systematically in use on Earth and the Periphery for about one hundred and fifty years. Bioblockade is not a professional term, and is used primarily by journalists. Medical specialists call this procedure fukamization in honor of the sisters Natalya and Hosiko Fukami, who were the first to give a theoretical basis for it and to put it into practice. The aim of fukamization is raising the natural level of adaptation of the human body to external conditions (bioadaptation). In its classic form, the procedure of fukamization is used exclusively on infants, beginning with the third trimester of its intrauterine development. As far as I have learned and understood, the procedure consists of two stages.

The introduction of UNBLAF serum (the “bacteria of life” culture) raises resistance by several orders to all known infections and viruses — viral, bacterial, or spore — and also to all organic toxins. (This basically is the bioblockade.)

Unbreaking the hypothalamus with microwave radiation increases the body’s ability to adapt to such physical agents of the environment as strong radiation, toxic gas, and high temperatures. Besides which, the ability to regenerate damaged organs increases

the spectrum visible to the retina, and response to psychotherapy is heightened.

The complete test of instruction on fukamization is appended below.

2. The procedure of fukamization was used up until 85 as a mandatory procedure in accordance with the law on Mandatory Bioblockade. In the year 82, a draft of an amendment was presented to the World Council, calling for an end to mandatory fukamization for infants born on Earth. The Amendment called for “maturity vaccination,” to be given to people who reached the age of sixteen, to replace fukamization. In 85, the World Council (by majority of only twelve votes) passed the” Amendment to the law on Mandatory Bioblockade. According to this Amendment, fukamization was no longer mandatory, and its use was left up to the parents. People who did not undergo fukamization in infancy had the right to later refuse the maturity vaccination. However, in that case, they could not work in professional fields involving heavy physical and psychological stress. According to the BVI, at the present time there are close to a million teenagers on Earth who have not been fukamized and close to twenty thousand people who have refused the maturity vaccination.

INSTRUCTION On antenatal and postnatal fukamization of newborns.

1. Determine the exact time of start of birth by the method of even integrals. (Recommended diagnostics: radioimmune assay NIMB, selectors FDH-4 and FDH-8.)

2. No less than 18 hours before the first uterine construction, determine the volume of the fetus and the volume of the amniotic fluid separately.

Note: Lazarevich’s correction is mandatory! The calculations must be made only through the monographs of the Institute of Bioadaptation, taking into account racial differences.

3. Determine the necessary dose of UNBLAF serum. A full, stable, long-term immunization to alum agents and organic compounds of albumen and haptoid structures is achieved at a dose of 6.8094 gamma moles per gram of lymph tissue.

Note: a) At an index of volumes of less than 3.5, the dose is

increased by 16 percent. b) With multiple fetuses, the total dose of injected serum is reduced by 8 percent for each fetus (twins 8 percent, triplets 16 percent, etc.).

4. Six hours before the first uterine contraction, use the nul injector to introduce through the anterior abdominal wall into the amniotic fluid the calibrated dose of UNBLAF serum. The infection is done from the side, away from the fetus's back.

5. Fifteen minutes after birth, perform a scintigraph of the newborn's thymus. If the index is under 3.8, introduce an additional 2.6750 gamma moles of UNBLAF serum into the umbilical vein.

6. In an increase of body temperature, immediately place the newborn in a sterile box. The first natural feeding is permitted no sooner than after 12 hours of normal temperature.

7. The hypothalamic zones of adaptogenesis are irradiated with microwaves 72 hours after birth. The topography distribution of the zones is calculated by the program BINAR-1. The volumes of the hypothalamic zones should correspond as follows:

Zone I: 36-42 neurons Zones II: 178-194 neurons Zones III: 125-139 neurons Zones IV: 460-510 neurons Zones V: 460-510 neurons

Note: When performing measurements, be sure that birth hematomas have dissolved completely.

The obtained data is put in the BIOFAK-PULSE.

HAND CORRECTION OF THE PULSE IS CATEGORICALLY FORBIDDEN.

8. Place the newborn in the operating chamber of the BIOFAK-PULSE. In orienting the head, watch especially that the angle of deviation on the stereotaxis scale is no more than 0.0014.

9. Microwave irradiation of the hypothalamic zones of adaptogenesis is done by reaching the second level of deep sleep, which corresponds to 1.8 - 2.1 alpha on an encephalogram.

10. All data must be entered on the newborn's personal chart.

From the events that led to the passage of the Amendment to the Law on Mandatory Bioblockade in February 85, I have determined:

1. In the century and a half of global fukamization, not a single case is known to cause any damage. Therefore, it was not surprising

that until the spring of 61 very few mothers refused fukamization. The overwhelming majority of physicians with whom I consulted had not heard of any such cases before that year. But statements against fukamization, theoretical and propagandistic, had appeared frequently. Here is a typical one for our age:

Pumivur, K. "Rider: Rights and Responsibilities." Bangkok, 15.

The author, vice president of the World Association of Reederers, is an adherent and propagandizer of maximally active participation of reederers in the activities of mankind. He argues against fukamization, basing his argument on the data of personal statistics. He maintains that fukamization is allegedly harmful for the appearance of reeder potential in man, and even though the relative number of reederers in the era of fukamization did not decrease, during that time there were no reederers of the power comparable to those active in the late twenty-first and early twenty-second centuries. He calls for the abolition of the mandatory nature of fukamization — at first, at least for the children and grandchildren of reederers. (All the materials of the books are hopelessly out of date: in the Thirties a brilliant constellation of reederers of incredible power appeared — Alexander Solemba, Peter Dzonny, et al.)

Debuque, Charles. "To Build Man?" Lyon, 32.

A posthumous edition of the major (and now forgotten) antieugenicist. The second half of the book is devoted wholly to the criticism of fukamization as a "shamelessly subversive invasion into the natural state of the human organism." He stresses the irreversible character of the changes made by fukamization ("... no one has ever been able to slow down an unbridled hypothalamus..."), but the main thrust of his argument is the fact that this is a typical eugenic procedure, imbued with the authority of world law, and which for many years has served as a bad and tempting precedent for new eugenic experiments.

Skesis, August. "The Stumbling Stone." Athens, 37.

The famous theoretician and preacher of neophilism devoted his brochure to harsh criticism of fukamization, but to a poetic criticism rather than a rational one. Within the framework of the concepts of neophilism, like a vulgarization of the theory of Yakovits, the universe is the location of the neocosm, in which the mental and emotional code of a human personality flows after his

death. Judging by everything, Skesis knows absolutely nothing about fukamization, indeed imagines it to be something like an appendectomy, and passionately calls on people to reject such a crude procedure, which mutilates and distorts the mental and emotional code. (According to BVI statistics, after the passage of the Amendment, not a single member of the congregation of neophiles agreed to the fukamization of his children.)

Toseville, G. "Insolent Man." Birmingham, 51.

This monograph is a typical example of a whole library of books and brochures devoted to the propaganda of putting an end to technological progress. All these books are characterized by an apologia for stuck civilizations like the Tagorian or the biocivilization of Leonida. Earth's technological progress is declared to be done with. Man's expansion into the cosmos is depicted as a kind of social extravagance, which will bring a cruel disillusionment. Rational Man turns into Insolent Man, who in his striving for quantity of traditional and emotional information loses in its quality. (The assumption is that information on the psychocosmos is of immeasurably higher quality than information about the external cosmos in the broadest meaning of the word.) Fukamization does humanity a bad service precisely because it furthers the transformation of Rational Man into Insolent Man, broadening and in fact stimulating his expansionist potential. He proposes a first stage of refusing the unbreaking of the hypothalamus.

Oxovu, K "Movement Along a Vertical." Calcutta, 61.

K. Oxovu is the pseudonym for a scientist or a group of scientists who formulated and disseminated the unknown idea of so-called vertical progress of humanity. I was unable to learn the real name of the author. I have reason to suspect that K. Oxovu is either G. Komov, Chairman of COMCON-1, or someone from the Academy of Social Prognosis who shares his views. The present edition is the first monograph of the "verticalists." The sixth chapter is devoted to a detailed examination of all aspects of fukamization — biological, social, and ethical — from the point of view of the precepts of vertical progress. The basic danger of fukamization is seen to be the possibility of uncontrolled influence of genetics. To support this idea, they give data (for the first time, as far as I can determine) on the many incidents of passing along to children the qualities of

fukamization. There are over one hundred such cases where the mechanism of the fetus while still in the mother's womb began developing antibodies, characteristic of the action of UNBLAF serum, and over two hundred cases of newborns with an unbraked hypothalamus. Moreover, over thirty cases have been reported of passing these qualities on to the third generation. They stress that while these phenomena pose no threat to the overwhelming majority of people, they are an eloquent illustration of the fact that fukamization has not been as thoroughly studied as its adepts claim.

I must say that the material has been selected with extraordinary thoroughness and presented very effectively. For instance: several striking paragraphs are devoted to so-called G-allergics, for whom an unbraked hypothalamus is contradicted G-allergy is an extremely rare condition of the organism, easily detected in the fetus while still in utero and posing no danger to anyone; an infant like that simply does not have the second stage of fukamization. However, if an unbraked hypothalamus is passed on to a G-allergic by heredity, medicine will be powerless, and an incurably sick person will be born. K. Oxovu managed to find one such case, and he does not hold back on color in his description.

The author paints on even more apocalyptic picture in depicting the world of the future, in which humanity, under the influence of fukamization, is split into two genotypes. This monograph has been reprinted many times, and played a not unimportant role in the discussion of the Amendment. It is interesting to note that the last edition of this book (Los Angeles, 99) does not contain a single word about fukamization; we are to understand that the author is completely satisfied with the amendment, and the fate of 99.9 percent of the population, who continue to subject their children to fukamization, does not worry him.

Note: In concluding this section, I feel it necessary to stress the fact that the selection and annotation of the materials was done on the principle of their lack of triviality from my personal point of view. I apologize in advance if the low level of my erudition causes dissatisfaction.

2. Apparently, the first refusal to be fukamized, which began a whole epidemic of refusals, was recorded in the maternity home of the village of K'Sava (Equatorial Africa). On 17/4/81, all three women who entered the home that day, independently of one

another and in differing forms, categorically forbid the personnel to perform the procedure of fukamization. Mother 1 (first child) motivated her refusal on her husband's wishes, and the slightest attempts to change her mind made her go into hysterics. Mother 2 (first child) did not even try to give a motivation for her refusal. "I don't want to, and that's that!" she kept repeating. Mother 3 (third child, first protest) was very reasonable and calm, and explained her refusal by not wanting to decide her child's fate without his knowledge and consent "When he grows up, he'll decide," she announced.

(I cite the motivations because they are very typical. With slight variations, the "refuser" used them in 99 percent of the cases. The literature uses three classifications. Refusal type A: totally rational, but in principle unverifiable, motivation; 25 percent. Refusal type B: pure phobia, hysterical, irrational behavior; 60 percent. Refusal type C: ethical considerations; 10 percent. Refusal type R (rate): references extremely varied in form and content: religious circumstances, adherence to exotic philosophical systems, and so on; e. 5 percent).

On April 18, in the same hospital, there were two more refusals, and new refusals were registered in maternity homes in the region. By the end of the month, refusals numbered in the hundreds, registered in all regions of the globe, and on May 5 came the first report of a refusal outside Earth (Mars, the Big Syrt). The epidemic of refusals, waxing and waning, continued right up to the year 85, so that by the time the Amendment was passed, there were almost fifty-thousand refusers (0.1 percent of all mothers).

The laws of epidemics have been studied phenomenologically very well and with a high degree of veracity. Yet, they did not result in convincing explanations.

For instance, it was noted that the epidemic had two geographic centers of distribution: one in equatorial Africa, the other in northeastern Siberia. An analogy with the probable distribution centers of humanity comes to mind, but this analogy, of course, explains nothing.

A second example. The refusals were always individual; however, within each maternity home, each refusal seemed to continue the previous one. Hence the term "chain of refusals of X number of

links.” The number X could be quite large: in the maternity home in the Howekai Gyneclinic, the “chain of refusals” began on 11/09/83 and extended until 21/09/83, pulling all the mothers who came into the home, so that the length of the “chain” contained nineteen mothers.

In some hospitals, the epidemics of refusals arose and died down several times. For instance, the epidemic was repeated twelve times in the Berne Palace of the Child.

For all this, the overwhelming majority of maternity homes on earth never heard about the epidemics of refusals. Just as most extraterrestrial settlements did not hear of the refusals. However, in places where the epidemics broke out (Big Syrt, Saula base, Resort), they developed according to the laws typical for Earth.

3. A large body of literature is devoted to the causes of fukamiphobia. I familiarized myself with the most solid works in the field, recommended to me by Professor Derouide of the Lhasa Psychology Center. I am insufficiently prepared to make a competent summary of these works, but I have formed the opinion that there is no generally accepted theory of fukamiphobia. Therefore, I will limit myself here to a verbatim fragment from my conversation with Professor Derouide.

QUESTION: Do you think it possible for the phobia to arise in a healthy and happy person?

ANSWER: Strictly speaking, that is impossible. In a healthy person, a phobia always arises as a consequence of excessive physical or psychological overload. You could hardly call such a person happy. But often, especially in our turbulent times, a person does not always realize that he has been overstrained... Subjectively, he might consider himself happy and even satisfied, and then the appearance of a phobia in him, from the point of view of a dilettante, may seem an inexplicable phenomenon...

QUESTION: And does this apply to fukamiphobia?

ANSWER: You know, even today, from a certain point of view, pregnancy remains a mystery... It is enough to say that we only recently understood that the mind of a pregnant woman is the psyche of the binary, the result of a devilishly complicated interaction of the fully formed psyche of a grown person and the antenatal psyche of the fetus, the laws of which are practically

unknown to us... And if you add to this the inevitable physical stress, the inevitable neurotic behavior... All that, in general, creates a rich soil for phobias. However, it would be rash to draw a conclusion from this, to think that this sort of discussion has in any way explained anything at all in this amazing business. Very rash... and not serious.

QUESTION: Are there any differences between the “refusers” and ordinary mothers? Physiological, psychological... Have there been studies?

ANSWER: Many. But nothing concrete has been established. I personally always felt, and still do, that fukamiphobia is a universal phobia, like, for instance, a phobia for zero-transportation. But zero-T-phobia is a very wide-spread phenomenon. Almost every human being experiences fear before his first zero-T-transfer, no matter what sex or profession, and then that fear disappears without a trace... while fukamiphobia is, luckily, a rare manifestation. I say luckily because we have not learned how to treat fukamiphobia.

QUESTION: Have I understood you correctly, professor, that there is not a single concrete cause known for fukamiphobia?

ANSWER: Not verifiably, no. But there have been many theories, dozens.

QUESTION: For instance?

ANSWER: For instance — propaganda by opponents of fukamization. An impressionable personality, especially in the state of pregnancy, could easily be influenced by such propaganda. Or, say, hypertrophy of the maternal instinct, the instinctive need to protect her child from any external actions, even beneficial ones... Are you planning to argue? Don't. I agree with you completely. All these hypotheses explain only a very narrow circle of facts, at best. No one could explain the phenomenon of the “chain of refusals,” nor the geographic peculiarities of the phenomenon... And no one at all understands why it all began in the spring of 81, and not only on Earth but also very far from earth...

QUESTION: And why did it end in 85? Can that be explained?

ANSWER: Just imagine — it can. Imagine that the fact of the Amendment passing could play a decisive role in ending the

epidemic. Naturally, there is still much that is unclear here, but just details.

QUESTION: What do you think — could the epidemic have broken out as the result of some careless experiments?

ANSWER: Theoretically, that is possible. But in our time we checked that hypothesis out. There were no experiments being carried out on earth that could have caused mass phobias. Besides, do not forget, that fukamiphobia broke out beyond Earth at the same time...

QUESTION: What sort of experiments could have caused phobias?

ANSWER: Probably I did not make myself clear. I could name a series of technical methods with which I could create some phobia in you, a healthy man. Note that I said “some” phobia. For instance, if I irradiate you with a certain regimen of neutrino concentrates, you will develop a phobia. But what phobia will it be? Fear of heights? Fear of emptiness? Fear of fear? I can’t predict. There can certainly be no talk of eliciting a specific phobia, like fukamiphobia, the fear of fukamization... Unless it were in conjunction with hypnosis. But how can you realize that combination in practice?.. No, that’s not a serious consideration.

4. For all its geographical (and cosmographical) distribution, the incidence of fukamiphobia remained a very rare occurrence in medical practice, and on its own it would hardly have led to any changes in the law. However, the epidemic of fukamiphobia very quickly turned from a medical problem to an event of a social character.

August 81. The first registered protest of fathers, still individualized (complaints to local and regional medical authorities, separate appeals to local officials).

October 81. The first collective petition of 124 fathers and two obstetricians to the Commission for the Protection of Mothers and Infants under the World Council.

December 81. At the XVII World Congress of the Association of Obstetricians: physicians and psychologists first speak out against mandatory fukamization.

January 82. An initiative group, VEPI (named after the founder’s initials), is formed, uniting doctors, psychologists, sociologists,

philosophers, and lawyers. It was VEPI that started and brought to victory the struggle to pass the Amendment.

February 82. The first protest rally by opponents of fukamization in front of the World Council building.

June 82. The formal formation of the opposition to the law within the Commission on Protection of Motherhood and Infancy.

Further chronology of events is not interesting, from my point of view. The time (three and a half years) necessary for the World Council to study the Amendment from all sides and then pass it is sufficiently typical. However, what does not seem typical to me is the relationship between the number of mass proponents of the Amendment and the numbers of the professional corps. Usually, the number of mass proponents of a new law is at a minimum ten million people, while the professional corps, qualified to represent their interests (lawyers, sociologists, specialists in the give issue) is only several dozen people. In our case, the mass proponents of the Amendment (the “refusers,” their husbands and relatives, friends, sympathizers, and people who joined the movement our. of religious or philosophical considerations) were never truly a mass movement The total number of participants in the movement never exceeded half a million. As for the professional corps, the VEPI group alone al the time of passage had 536 specialists.

5. After the Amendment was passed, the refusals did not stop, even though their number diminished noticeably. Most importantly, during the year 85, the character of the epidemic changed. Actually, the phenomenon could no longer be called an epidemic. Whatever laws it had had (“the chains of refusals,” geographical concentration) disappeared. Now, the refusals were completely random, individual; and motivations A and B were no longer encountered. Now there were references to the Amendment. Apparently, that is why doctors today do not see refusals to be fukamized as manifestations of fukamiphobia. Amazingly, many women who had categorically refused fukamization and had played an active role in the campaign for the Amendment now have lost interest completely in the question and don’t even use the right granted by the Amendment when they give birth. Of the women who refused fukamization during the years 81-85, only 12 percent refused a second time. A third referral is very rare: only a few cases were recorded in fifteen years.

6. I feel I must stress two circumstances. a). The almost total disappearance of fukamiphobia after the Amendment was passed is usually explained by well-known psychosocial factors. Modern man accepts only those limitations and requirements that stem from moral and ethical orders of society. Any limitation or requirement based on other considerations is met with (unconscious) hostility and (instinctive) inner protest. And naturally, once they achieved freedom of choice in fukamization, people lost the basis for hostility and became neutral toward fukamization, as toward any other medical procedure.

Taking this consideration into account, I stress, nevertheless, the possibility of another interpretation — one that is of interest within the framework of theme 009. To wit: the story related above of the appearance and disappearance of fukamiphobia can be easily explained as the result of a concentrated, well-planned action of a certain rational will.

b). The epidemic of fukamiphobia corresponds well in time with the appearance of the Penguin Syndrome. (See my report No. 011/99.)

Sapieti sat,

T. Glumov

[End of Document 4.]

DOCUMENT 5:

NARRATIVE: Little Pesha: 6 May 99. Early morning

Little Pesha: 6 May 99. 6 AM

Little Pesha: Same Day. 8 AM

Office of the UE-2 Department: 6 May 99. Around 1 PM

REPORT COMCON-2 No. 013/99 Urals-North

Now I can maintain with total assurance that it was this report of Glumov's that forced the shift in my consciousness that led me finally to the Big Revelation. And, funny as it may seem now, that shift began with the uncontrollable irritation brought on by Toivo's crude and unambivalent hints about the alleged role of the "verticalists" in the history of the Amendment. In the original of the report, that paragraph is covered with thick marks in my hand; I remember quite well that I was planning to call Toivo on the carpet for his overactive imagination. But then I was given information on the Wizard's visit to the Institute of Eccentrics, I finally got the point, and I had no time for calling people on the carpet.

I was in a cruel crisis, because I had no one to talk to. First of all, I had no propositions. And secondly, I did not know with whom it was safe to talk now, and with whom it wasn't. Much later, I asked my group if they found anything strange about my behavior in those horrible (for me) days of April 99. Sandra was engrossed in the Rip Van Winkle theme and was bowled over himself and noticed nothing. Grisha Serosovin maintained that I was particularly silent then and replied to all initiatives on his part with a mysterious smile. And Kikin is Kikin: even then, "everything was clear" to him. Toivo Glumov must have been driven crazy by my behavior then. And he was. However, I really did not know what to do! One by one I sent my coworkers to the Institute of Eccentrics and waited each time to see what would happen, and nothing would happen, and I would send the next one and wait some more.

At that time, Gorbovsky died at his place in Kraslava.

At that time, Athos-Sidorov was preparing to go back into the

hospital, and there was no certainty that he would return.

At that time, Danya Logovenko invited himself over for a cup of tea for the first time in many years and spent the whole evening reminiscing, chatting nonsense.

At the time, I decided nothing.

On the night of May 5, the emergency service got me out of bed. In Little Pesha (on the Pesha River, which falls into the Czech inlet of the Barents Sea), some sort of monsters had appeared, creating panic in the villagers. The emergency squad was sent out to examine the site.

According to the rules, I had to send one of my inspectors to the site. I sent Toivo.

Unfortunately, Inspector Glumov's report on the events and on his actions in Little Pesha has apparently been lost. In any case, I have not been able to discover it... However, I would like to show how Toivo performed that study in as detailed a manner as possible, and therefore I will have to resort to a reconstruction of the events, basing it on my own memory and on conversations with participants in that event.

It is not hard to see that the reconstruction being offered (and all the ones that follow) contains, besides absolutely reliable facts, some descriptions, metaphors, epithets, dialogues, and other elements of fiction. But I need for the reader to see the living Toivo before him, the way I remember him. Documents alone are not enough. If one cares, however, one can examine my reconstructions as a special kind of deposition.

LITTLE PESHA. 6 MAY 99. EARLY MORNING

From above, Little Pesha looked just the way that village should look at 'three in the morning. Sleepy. Peaceful. Empty. A dozen multicolored roofs in a semicircle, a grass-covered square, several gliders standing around, the yellow club pavilion by the cliff over the river. The river seemed motionless, very cold, and uninviting; clumps of whitish fog hung over the reeds on the other side.

On the club porch, his head thrown back, a man stood watching a glider. His face seemed familiar to Toivo, and there was nothing amazing about that: Toivo knew many emergency-squad members — probably every other one.

He landed next to the porch and jumped out onto the damp grass. The morning here was cold. The emergency-squad man was wearing a huge, comfy jacket with numerous special packets, with nests for all their cylinders, regulators, extinguishers, igniters, and other objects for perfect emergency work.

“Hello,” said Toivo. “Basil, isn’t it!”

“Hello, Glumov,” the man responded, offering his hand. “Right. It’s Basil. What took you so long?”

Toivo explained that zero-T wasn’t working here in Little Pesha for some reason, that he was let out at Lower Pesha and had to take a glider there and fly over forty minutes above the river.

“I understand,” Basil said, and looked back at the pavilion. “That’s what I thought. You see, in their panic they mutilated their zero-T cabin...”

“You mean, no one has come back yet?”

“No one.”

“And nothing else has happened?”

“Nothing. Our people finished the examination ninety minutes ago, didn’t find anything substantial, and went home to do the lab work. They left me to keep everyone out, and I’ve spent the time repairing the zero-T cabin.”

“Have you fixed it?”

“More yes than no.”

The cottages of Little Pesha were ancient, built in the last century, utilitarian architecture, in toxically bright colors — from old age. Each cottage was surrounded by impenetrable currant bushes, lilacs, strawberries. And right beyond the semicircle of houses was the forest, the yellow trunks of gigantic firs, the crown gray-green in the fog, and above them, rather high up, the crimson disk of the sun in the northeast...

“What lab work?” Toivo asked.

“Well, there are a lot of clues... That disgusting stuff crawled out of that cottage, I guess, and spread in all directions...” Basil began pointing. “On the bushes, the grass, and on some of the verandas there’s dried slime, scales, clumps at something...”

“What did you see yourself?”

“Nothing. When we got here, it was like it is now, except there was fog on the river.”

“Then there are no witnesses?”

“At first, we thought everyone had run off. Then we learned that in that house there, the end one on the bank, there is a very elderly woman doing one, thank you, who never thought about running away...”

“Why not?” Toivo asked.

“No idea!” Basil replied, raising his eyebrows and spreading out his hands. “Can you imagine, total panic, everyone scattering, the door pulled off the hinges of the zero-cabin, and she doesn’t give a damn... We fly in, start up our whole battle campaign, sabers unsheathed, bayonets plugged in, and she comes out on her porch and demands severely that we be more quiet, because we’re keeping her up with our noise!”

“Had there been panic?” Toivo asked.

“And how!” Basil said, palm outstretched. “There were eighteen people here when it all began. Nine ran off on their gliders. Five escaped through the zero-cabin. And three ran off into the woods, and got lost; we were lucky to find them. So don’t have any doubts about it, there was panic... There was panic, and there were monsters, and they left traces. Now, why the old lady didn’t get scared, that we don’t know. She’s strange, that old lady. I heard her tell the commander: ‘You got here too late, boys. You can’t help them now. They’re all dead.’ “

Toivo asked: “What did she have in mind?”

“I don’t know,” Basil said grumpily. “I told you, she’s strange.”

Toivo looked at the toxic pink cottage that contained the old lady. The garden was well tended. There was a glider parked next to the cottage.

“I don’t recommend disturbing her,” Basil said. “Let her wake up on her own, and then you can talk —”

At that moment, Toivo felt something behind him and turned sharply. A pale face with wide-open, frightened eyes peered out of the club’s door. The stranger was silent for a few seconds; then his bloodless lips moved, and he said in a hoarse voice:

“A silly story, isn’t it?”

“Wait, wait, wait!” Basil said kindly, moving toward the man with his hands upturned and open. “Please forgive me; you can’t come in here. Emergency squad.”

The stranger nevertheless stepped across the threshold and stopped.

“I’m not trying,” he said, and coughed. “But circumstances... Tell me, did Grigory and Elya come back yet?”

He looked unusual enough. He was wearing a heavy coat with fur inside and outside, and beneath its tails you could see his richly embroidered fur boots. The coat was unbuttoned at the chest, revealing a colorful summer shirt of micromesh, which were popular in those days with inhabitants of the steppe zone. He looked forty or forty-five; his face was simple and nice, but too pale, either out of fear or embarrassment.

“No, no,” Basil replied, coming up close to him. “No one’s come back. We’re examining the area, and we’re not letting anyone in...”

“Wait, Basil,” Toivo said. “Who are Grigory and Elya?” he asked the stranger.

“I think I’m in the wrong place again,” the stranger said with despair, and looked over his shoulder into the depths of the pavilion where the zero-T-cabin glowed. “Excuse me, is this ... hm... Oh, Lord, I forgot again... Little Pesha? Or isn’t it?”

“It’s Little Pesha,” Toivo said.

“Then you must know ... Grigory Alexandrovich Yarygin... As I understand it, he lives here every summer.” Pointing, he suddenly cried out happily; ‘There it is, that cottage! That’s my raincoat on the veranda!’

Everything was cleared up. The stranger was a witness. His name was Anatoly Sergeyevich Krylenko, and he was a zoo technician; he did work in the steppe zone — in the Azgir agrocomplex. Yesterday, at the annual exhibition of innovations in Arkhangelsk, he bumped completely by accident into his old school friend, Grigory Yarygin, whom he hadn’t seen in some ten years. Naturally, Yarygin dragged him off to his place, here, in this... ah, forgot it again... oh, yes,, to Little Pesha. They spent a lovely evening yesterday, the three of them, Yarygin, his wife Elya, and Krylenko, went out in the boat,

walked in the woods, and got back around ten, to that cottage over there, had dinner, and settled down with tea on the veranda. It was still very light, children's voices carried from the river, and it was warm. The arctic strawberries smelled terrific. And then, suddenly, Anatoly Sergeyevich Krylenko saw eyes...

In this most important part of his story, Anatoly Sergeyevich grew incomprehensible, to put it mildly. He seemed to be trying to recall a horrible, complicated dream.

The eyes were staring from the garden ... they were moving closer and stayed in the garden... Two huge, nauseating eyes... Something kept dripping on them... And on the left, to the side, was a third... or three?... And something kept falling, falling, Ailing through the railing of the veranda and was creeping up the steps... And it was impossible to move. Grigory disappeared somewhere; he couldn't see Grigory. Elya was somewhere nearby, but he couldn't see her either. He could hear her screaming hysterically... or laughing... Then the door flew open. The room was about waist-deep in writhing jellied carcasses, and the eyes of the carcasses were outside, behind the bushes...

Anatoly Sergeyevich realized that the scariest part was just beginning. He pulled his feet out of the sandals that were stuck to the floor, jumped over the table, fled into the woods, and ran around the house... No, he didn't run around the house, he had jumped into the woods but ended up in the square... He ran wherever his feet took him, and suddenly saw the club pavilion, and through the open door he saw the violet flash of zero-T, and he realized that he was saved. He burst into the cabin like a bomb and began pushing buttons and keys at random, until the machine worked...

The tragedy ended there, and the comedy began. The zero-transporter threw Anatoly Sergeyevich out in the settlement of Roosevelt on the Island of Peter the Great. That's in the Bellingshausen Sea, 49 below, wind speed 18 meters per second, and the settlement was almost empty, winter-like.

Of course, the automatic machinery was on in the polar-bear club; it was warm and cozy, and a brilliant rainbow of bottles glimmered in the bar, intended to light up the darkness of the polar nights. Anatoly Sergeyevich, in his light shirt and shorts, still wet

from the tea and the horror, got the rest he needed and came to his senses. And when he came to his senses, the first thing he felt, as was to be expected, was unbearable shame. He realized that he had fled in panic like the lowliest coward... He had read about such cowards in historical novels. He remembered that he had abandoned Elya and at least one other woman, whom he had noticed in passing in the neighboring cottage. He remembered the children's voices on the river and realized that he had abandoned those children, too. A desperate urge to action overwhelmed him. But here's the amazing part: the urge did not arise immediately, and secondly, once it did arise, he remained for a rather long time in unbearable horror at the thought of returning there, to the veranda, to the field of vision of those nightmarish dripping eyes, to the revolting jellied carcasses...

A noisy group of glaciologists burst into the club and found Anatoly Sergeyevich gloomily wringing his hands: he still had not made up his mind to do anything. The glaciologists heard him out in total sympathy and immediately and enthusiastically decided to return to the horrible veranda with him. But then they discovered that Anatoly Sergeyevich not only did not know the zero-index of the village but had forgotten its name. He could tell them only that it was not far from the Barents Sea, on the banks of a small river, in the zone of arctic firs. Then the glaciologists dressed Anatoly Sergeyevich in clothes more suitable to the local climate and, through the howling blizzard and monstrous snowdrifts, led him to the settlement headquarters accompanied by gigantic beast-like hounds... And at headquarters, at the BVI terminal, one of the glaciologists had the very sobering thought that this was no joke. The monsters must have escaped from some bestiary, or — horrible thought! — from some lab constructing biomechanisms. In any case, amateur activity was uncalled for, boys; we have to notify the emergency squad.

And they called Central Emergency. At Central Emergency, they thanked them and said they would take the information into account. A half-hour later the duty officer called headquarters and told them that their call was confirmed and asked to speak with Anatoly Sergeyevich. Anatoly Sergeyevich described in the most general terms what had happened to him and how he came to be on the shores of the Antarctic. The duty officer calmed him down by

telling him there had been no casualties, that the Yarygins were alive and well and that he would be able to return to Little Pesha in the morning, and that now he should take a tranquilizer and lie down.

And Anatoly Sergeyevich took a tranquilizer and lay down right at headquarters. But he had not slept an hour before he saw the dripping eyes over the veranda railing and heard Elya's hysterical laughter, and he awoke full of unbearable shame.

"No," Anatoly Sergeyevich said, "they did not stop me. They understood how I felt... I never thought something like that would happen to me. I'm no Pathfinder or Progressor, of course... but I've had acute situations in my life, and I've always behaved decently... I don't understand what happened to me. I try to explain it to myself, and nothing happens... It was like an invasion..." He started looking around. "I'm talking to you now, but I'm ice inside... Maybe we were all poisoned by something here?"

Toivo asked questions, Anatoly Sergeyevich answered, and Toivo nodded importantly and showed in every way possible how essential everything he was hearing was for the investigation. And gradually Anatoly Sergeyevich relaxed, cheered up, and they stepped onto the veranda as colleagues.

The veranda was a shambles. The table was at an angle, one of the chairs was turned over, the sugar bowl had rolled into a corner, leaving a trail of sugar crystals. Toivo felt the kettle; it was still hot. He glanced over at Anatoly Sergeyevich. He was pale again, and his muscles were twitching. He was looking at a pair of sandals huddling like orphans under the far chair. Apparently, they were his. The straps were buckled, and it seemed impossible for Anatoly Sergeyevich to have pulled his feet out. But Toivo did not see any spills on them, under them, or anywhere near them.

"I see they don't recognize domestic robots here," Toivo said to bring Anatoly Sergeyevich back from the world of the horror to the world of everyday life.

"Yes," he muttered. "That is ... Who does nowadays?.. There... see, my sandals..."

"I see," Toivo said matter-of-factly. "Were all the windows opened like this? You don't think that it was a hallucination?"

Anatoly Sergeyevich shuddered and looked in the direction of the Yarygin cottage.

“I don’t know...” he said. “No, I can’t say.”

“All right, let’s go look,” Toivo suggested.

“You and I?” Basil asked.

“Not necessary,” Toivo said. “I’ll be going back and forth here a long time. You hold the fort.”

“Do I take prisoners?” Basil asked formally.

“That is necessary,” Toivo said “I need prisoners. Anyone who saw anything with his own eyes.”

He and Anatoly Sergeyevich moved on across the square. Anatoly Sergeyevich looked determined and businesslike, but the closer he got to the house, the more tense his face looked and the more his tendons showed on his neck. He was biting his lip as if fighting pain. Toivo thought it wise to give him a break. About fifty paces from the living fence, he stopped — as if to look around one more time — and began asking questions. Was there anyone in the cottage on the right? Oh, it was dark? And on the left? The woman... Yes, yes, I remember, you mentioned her... Just one woman and no one else? Was there a glider nearby?

“I don’t remember. That one was open. I jumped out there.”

“I see,” Toivo said, and looked out into the garden.

Yes, there were footprints here. There were many footprints: crushed and broken bushes, a destroyed flower bed, and the grass under the railings looked as if horses had trampled it. If animals had been here, then they were clumsy, awkward animals; and they hadn’t crept up on the house, but pushed straight on. From the square, through the bushes at an angle, and through the open windows right into her rooms...

Toivo crossed the veranda and pushed the door into the house. There was nothing disorderly inside. Rather, none of the disorder that one could expect from heavy, unwieldy carcasses.

A couch. Three armchairs. No table in sight — it must be built in. Only one control panel — in the arm of the owner’s armchair. There were polycrystal service systems in the other chairs and in the couch. On the front wall hung a Levitan landscape, an old-fashioned

chromophoton copy with a touching triangle in the bottom left-hand corner, so that, God forbid, some expert would not be fooled into taking it for an original. And on the left wall: a pen drawing in a handmade wooden frame, an angry woman's face. A beautiful one, incidentally...

A more careful examination revealed footprints on the floor, apparently, one of the emergency crewmen had walked from the living room to the bedroom. The foot-prints did not return; the man had climbed out the bedroom window. So, the floor in the living room was covered with a rather thick layer of very fine brown powder. And not only the floor. The chair seats. The window ledges. The couch. There was no powder on the walls.

Toivo came back out on the veranda. Anatoly Sergeyevich was sitting on the porch steps. He had tossed off the fur coat, but he had forgotten to toss off the fur boots, and consequently he had a rather incongruous air about him. He had not even touched his sandals; they were still under the chair. There were no spills nearby, but the sills and the floor were covered with the brown powder.

"Well, how are you doing?" Toivo asked from the doorway.

Anatoly Sergeyevich was startled anyway.

"Well... I'm slowly coming to terms with it."

"Fine. Pick up your raincoat and go home. Or do you want to wait for the Yarygins?"

"I don't know," Anatoly Sergeyevich said indecisively.

"As you prefer," Toivo said. "In any case, there's nothing dangerous here."

"Have you understood anything?" Anatoly Sergeyevich asked.

"A few things. There really were monsters here, but they are not dangerous. They can scare you, and nothing more."

"You mean it was lake?"

"Looks like it."

"But why? Who?"

"We'll find out."

"You'll be finding out while they scare someone else."

Anatoly Sergeyevich took his raincoat from the railing and stood

around, staring at his fur boots. It seemed that he would sit down again and start pulling them off angrily. But he probably didn't even see them.

"You say they can scarce a person," he said through gritted teeth, without looking up. "Scare isn't so bad! But you know, they can break a man!"

He gave Toivo a quick look and averted his eyes and went down the steps without looking back, then down along the trampled grass, through the damaged flower bed, across the square at an angle, bent over, clumsy in his long polar fur boots and jaunty shepherd shirt, he walked on, increasing his steps, to the yellow club pavilion, but halfway there veered sharply to the left, jumped into the glider near the neighboring cottage, and flew up like a candle into the pale blue sky.

It was after four in the morning.

This is my first attempt at a reconstruction. I tried very hard. My work was complicated by the fact that I had never been in Little Pesha in those bygone days, but I had numerous video-recordings made by Toivo Glumov, the emergency squad, and Fleming's crew. So I can vouch at least for the topographic accuracy. I feel it is possible to vouch for the accuracy of the dialogue, as well.

Besides everything else, I would like to demonstrate here how the typical beginning of the typical investigation looked. Incident. Emergency squad. Arrival of the inspector from the Unexplained Event Department. First impression (most often very right): someone's hooliganism or a stupid joke. And growing disillusionment: not it again, once again zero, why not shrug this off and just go home to bed. However, that's not in my reconstruction. I suggest you add that, reading between the lines.

Now a few words about Fleming.

This name will appear more than once in my memoir, but I want to warn you that this man had nothing to do with the Big Revelation. In those days, the name Alexander Jonathan Fleming was the talk of COMCON-2. He was the major specialist in the construction of artificial organisms. At his base, the Sydney Institute, and in the branches of the Institute, he cooked up with indescribable industriousness and daring a great number of the wildest creatures, for which Mother Nature had not had enough

imagination and know-how. In their eagerness, his coworkers were instantly violating the existing laws and limitations of the World Council in the area of frontier experimentation. For all our purely human delight and awe for Fleming's genius, we could not stand him for his mediocrity, lack of conscience, and pushiness, amazingly coexisting with his ability to get out of trouble. Every schoolboy knows now what Fleming's biocomplexes are or, say, Fleming's living wells. In those days, he was rather more notorious than famous.

It is important for my narrative that one of the far-flung branches of Fleming's Sydney Institute was located in the mouth of the Pesha River, in the scientific community lower Pesha, just forty kilometers from Little Pesha. Having learned about that, my Toivo naturally grew wary and said to himself, "Aha, so that's whose work this is!"

Oh, by the way, the crawcrabs mentioned below are one of Fleming's most useful creations, which first appeared when he was still a young worker in a ash farm on Lake O'Nega. Crawcrabs turned out to be creatures astonishing in their delicate taste, but for some reason they did well only in the small streams that fed the Pesha.

LITTLE PESHA. 6 MAY 99 6 AM

On 5 May, around 11 PM, in the resort village of Little Pesha (thirteen cottages, eighteen residents), panic rose. The cause of the panic was the appearance of a certain (unknown) number of quasibiological creatures of an extremely repulsive and even frightening appearance. The creatures moved on the village from cottage number 7 in nine clearly visible directions. These directions can be seen from the trampled grass, damaged bushes, by stains of dried slime on foliage, paving stone, on the outside walls and window ledges. All nine routes ended inside living quarters; to wit: in cottages numbers 1, 4, 10 (on the verandas), 2, 3, 9, 12 (in the living room), 6, 11, and 13 (in the bedroom). Cottages 4 and 9 apparently are uninhabited...

As for cottage number 7, where the invasion began, someone clearly was living there, and it remains only to determine who that was — a stupid practical joker or an irresponsible dolt! Did he activate the embryophores on purpose, or did he miss the self-start? If he missed it, then was it by criminal negligence or ignorance?

Two things, however, bothered him. Toivo did not find any traces of the embryophore cases. That's one. And two, at first he could not find any data on the person inhabiting cottage number 7. Or persons.

Suddenly, indignant voices were heard on the square, and in a minute, Toivo learned that the original inhabitant had appeared in the midst of the events himself, in person, and not alone, but with a guest.

He turned out to be a stocky, cast-iron-looking man in a travel jumpsuit and with a canvas sack from which came strange rustling and creaking noises. The guest acutely reminded Toivo of good old Duremar, right out of Aunt Tortilla's pond — tall, long-haired, long-nosed, skinny, in vague rags covered with drying seaweed.

It was instantly established that the stocky, cast-iron inhabitant was Ernst Jurgen, who worked as an orthomaster operator on Titan and who was on vacation on Earth... He had two months leave a year on Earth — one month in winter, one in the summer — and he always spent the summer here on the Pesha in this very cottage... What monsters? Who exactly did you have in mind, young man? What monsters could there be in Little Pesha? Think about it. And you call yourself an emergency-squad member. What's the matter, don't you have anything else to do with your time?

Duremar, on the contrary, seemed totally earthbound. Moreover, he seemed local. His surname was Tolstov, and his name was Lev Nikolaevich. But something else about him was amazing, too. He worked and lived just forty kilometers away from here, in Lower Pesha, where for the last several years Fleming's branch offices were flourishing.

It also turned out that this Ernst Jurgen and his old pal, Lev Tolstov, were passionate gourmets. They met here every day, in Little Pesha, because five kilometers upriver a little stream fell into the river, and it was full of crawcrabs, whatever they were. That was why Ernst Jurgen spent his vacation in Little Pesha, and that's why he and his friend Lev Tolstov left early in the evening by boat to catch crawcrabs, and that's why he and Lev would be very grateful to the emergency squad if they would leave them alone, since the crawcrabs (Ernst Jurgen shook the heavy sack from which emanated the strange sounds) are fresh only briefly, and that was

right now...

This funny, noisy man could not understand that events could occur on Earth — not on Titan, or Pandora, or Yaula, but on Earth! in Little Pesha! — that could elicit fear and panic. Typical example of a professional space traveler. He could see that the village was empty, he could see a member of the emergency squad before him, he could see a representative of COMCON-2, he did not deny their authority, and he was ready to seek an explanation for all of it in anything as long as he did not have to admit that something could go wrong on his own Earth...

Then, when they managed to convince him that there had been an unexplained event, he was insulted — pouted like a child and walked away, dragging the sack with the precious crawcrabs, and sat down on the porch, his back to everyone, not wanting to see anyone or hear anything, shrugging from time to time and muttering to himself, “A vacation, they call it... You come once a year, and this has to happen... How could it be!”

Toivo, incidentally, was more interested in the reaction of his friend, Lev Nikolaevich Tolstov, who worked for Fleming, a specialist in the construction and activation into existence of artificial organisms. And this was the specialist's reaction: at first, total incomprehension, goggling eyes and uncertain smile, befitting a man who thinks a joke is being played on him, and not a very clever one at that. Then: a perplexed frown, empty gaze that seemed inward-directed, and thoughtful motion of the jaw. And finally: an explosion of professional anger. Do you realize what you are saying? Do you have any knowledge of the subject? Have you ever seen an artificial creature? Ah, only in the newsreels? Well, let me tell you that there aren't any and can't be any artificial creatures that are capable of climbing into people's bedroom windows. First of all, they are slow and clumsy, and if they do move, it's away from people, not toward them, because natural biofields are contradicted, even a cat's biofield... Further, what do you mean, ‘the size of a cow’?. Have you tried to figure how much energy is needed for an embryophore to develop to that mass in even an hour? There wouldn't be anything left here, no cows left; it would look like an explosion!..

Did he think that there could have been activated embryophores here of a type he did not know?

Certainly not. Embryophores like that did not exist in nature.

Then what happened here, in his opinion?

Lev Tolstov did not understand what had happened here. He had to look around before coming to any conclusion.

Toivo led him to look around, then went with Basil to the club to have a snack.

They had a cold meat sandwich, and Toivo tried to make some coffee. And then: "Mmmmm!" Basil said with his mouth full.

He swallowed mightily and, looking past Toivo, called out loudly: "Hold it! Where are you headed, son?"

Toivo turned around. There was a boy of twelve or so, lop-eared and tan, wearing shorts and an open shirt. Basil's mighty cry had stopped him in the pavilion exit.

"Home," he said challengingly.

"Come here, please!" Basil said.

The boy moved closer and stopped, his hands behind his back.

"Do you live here?" Basil asked ingratiatingly.

"We used to live here," the boy replied. "In number six. Now we won't live here anymore."

"Who's we?" Toivo asked.

"Me, Mama, and Papa. Rather, we were here on vacation and we live in Petrozavodsk."

"And where are your parents?"

"Sleeping. At home."

"Sleeping," Toivo repeated. "What's your name?"

"Kir."

"Do your parents know you're here?"

Kir hesitated, shuffled his feet, and said, "I came back here just for a minute. I had to get my galleyship. I worked on it for a whole month."

"Your galley..." Toivo repeated, looking at the boy.

The boy's face expressed nothing but patient boredom. It was obvious that only one thing concerned him: to get his galley and get

home before his parents awakened.

“When did you leave here?”

“Last night. Everyone was leaving, and so did we. And we forgot the galley.”

“Why were they leaving?”

“There was a panic. Didn’t you know? Wow, what went on here! Mama got scared and Papa said, ‘Well, you know, let’s get out of here and go home.’ We got in the glider and flew off... So, can I go?”

“Wait a minute. Why was there a panic, do you think?”

“Because those animals came. Out of the woods ... or the river. Everyone got scared of them for some reason and started running around. I was asleep; Mama woke me.”

“You weren’t afraid?”

He jerked his shoulder.

“Well, I was scared at first ... half asleep... Everyone was screaming, shouting, running; you couldn’t understand what was going on...”

“And then?”

“I told you: we got in the glider and left.”

“Did you see those animals?”

The boy laughed.

“I saw them, of course... One climbed right in the window, with horns; only the horns weren’t hard, they were like a snail’s... really cute...”

“You weren’t afraid?”

“No, I told you: I was scared at first. Why would I lie? Mama ran in all white; I thought something terrible had happened... I thought, something happened to Father...”

“I see, I see. But the animals didn’t scare you?”

Kir said, “Why should I be afraid of them? They were kind and funny... they were soft, silky like a mongoose, but without fur. So what if they’re big? Tigers are also big, so I’m supposed to be afraid of them? Elephants are big, whales are big... dolphins are

sometimes big... These animals weren't any bigger than a dolphin, and they were just as gentle."

Toivo looked at Basil. Basil, his jaw hanging, was listening to the strange boy and holding his half-eaten sandwich.

"And they smell good!" Kir went on hotly. "They smell of berries! I think they feed on them... They should be domesticated. Why should people run from them?" He sighed. "Now they're gone, probably. Go find them in the taiga... Ha! Everybody shouted at them, stamped their feet, and waved their arms at them! Of course they got scared! And now go lure them back..."

He lowered his head and gave in to sorrow thoughts. Toivo said, "I see. However, your parents don't agree with you. Right?"

Kir waved his hand.

"Ah... Father's not so bad, but Mama is firm: not a single step, never, no way! Now we're leaving for Resort. They don't have them there, do they? Do they? What are they called, do you now?"

"I don't know, Kir," Toivo said.

"But there's not even one left here?"

"Not one."

"Just what I thought," Kir said. He sighed, and then asked, "Can't I take my galley?"

Basil finally got hold of himself. He got up noisily and said, "Come on, I'll walk you. Okay?" he asked Toivo.

"Of course."

"Why walk me?" Kir asked indignantly, but Basil had already put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Let's go, let's go," he said. "I've been dreaming of seeing a real galley all my life."

"It's not real, it's a model..."

"All the more. All my life I've dreamed of seeing a model of a real galley..."

They left. Toivo drank a cup of coffee and also left the pavilion.

The sun was noticeably hot, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. Blue dragonflies flickered over the green grass of the square. Through the metallic flickering, like a crazy daylight apparition, a

majestic old woman floated toward the pavilion with an expression of absolute aloofness on her narrow brown face.

Holding, devilishly elegantly, the hem of her snowy white dress with a brown birdlike hand, she seemed not to touch the ground as she approached Toivo and stopped.

Toivo bowed respectfully, and she nodded in response, quite benevolently.

“You may call me Albina,” she said kindly in a pleasant baritone.

Toivo hurriedly introduced himself. Her brown forehead frowned beneath her cap of white hair.

“COMCON? Be kind enough, Toivo, to tell me please how you people at COMCON explain all this?”

“What exactly do you have in mind?”

This question irritated her.

“I mean this, dear boy,” she said. “How could it happen that in our day, at the end of our age, here on Earth, living creatures that called on humans for help and pity not only did not receive pity or help but became the object of badgering, hostility, and even active physical action of the most barbaric kind. I do not wish to name names, but they struck them with rakes, they shouted madly at them, they even tried to run them over with gliders. I would have never believed it if I had not seen it with my own eyes. Are you familiar with the concept of savagery? Well, this was savagery! I am ashamed.”

She stopped talking, never taking the penetrating gaze of her angry, coal-black, and very young eyes from Toivo. She was waiting for an answer, and Toivo muttered:

“Will you permit me to bring out a chair for you?”

“I will not,” she said. “I do not intend to sit around with you. I would like to hear your opinion on what happened to the people in the village. Your professional opinion. What are you? A sociologist? Teacher? Psychologist” Then please explain! Understand that we are not talking about sanctions. But we must understand how it could happen, how people who were civilized, well-brought-up... I would even say marvelous people just yesterday, today suddenly lose their human image? Do you know what distinguishes man from

the other creatures of the world?"

"Um... reason?" Toivo suggested.

"No, my dear! Mercy! Mer-cy!"

"Well, of course," Toivo said. "But how does it follow that those creatures needed mercy?"

She looked at him with disgust.

"Did you see them yourself?" she said.

"No."

"Then how can you judge?"

"I'm not judging," Toivo said. "I am trying to establish what they wanted..."

"I believe I made it quite clear that those living creatures, those poor things, were seeking help from us! They were on the brink of destruction! They were about to die! They did die, didn't you know that? They died before my very eyes and turned to nothing, to dust, and I couldn't do anything about it. I'm a ballerina, not a biologist or a doctor. I called out, but who could have heard me in that orgy, that debauched savagery and cruelty! And then, when help finally did come, it was too late; no one was left alive. No one! And these savages... I don't know how to explain their behavior... Maybe it was mass psychosis... poisoning... I was always against using mushrooms as food... Probably, when they came to their senses, they were ashamed and ran off! Did you find them?"

"Yes," Toivo said.

"Did you speak with them?"

"Yes. With some of them. Not all."

"Then tell me, what had happened to them? What are your conclusions, even preliminary ones?"

"You see... madam..."

"You may call me Albina."

"Thank you. You see... the point is that as far as we can tell, most of your neighbors perceived this incident rather differently."

"Naturally!" Albina said haughtily. "I saw that with my own eyes!"

“No, no, I mean to say that they were frightened. They were frightened to death. They lost control in horror. They are afraid to come back here. Some want to leave Earth for good, as a result. As far as I can see, you are the only person who heard a plea for help.”

She listened imperiously, but attentively.

“Well,” she said. “Apparently, they are so ashamed they are using a fear as an excuse... Don’t believe them, dear boy, don’t! That’s the most primitive, the most shameful sort of xenophobia... Like racial prejudice. I remember as a child I was hysterically afraid of spiders and snakes... It’s the same thing here.”

“That’s quite possible. But here’s something else I would like to clear up. They asked for help, these creatures. They needed mercy. But how was it expressed? As far as I know, they did not speak, they did not even moan...”

“My dear man! They were sick, they were dying! So what if they were dying silently? A baby dolphin thrown onto dry land doesn’t make a sound either... at least not one we can hear... But we can tell it needs help, and we hurry to help... Here comes a boy; you can’t hear what he’s saying from this distance, but you can tell that he is energetic, happy...”

Kir came toward them from cottage number 6, and he really was clearly energetic and happy. Basil, striding next to him, was respectfully carrying a big, black model of an ancient galley, and seemed to be asking appropriate questions. Kir responded by pointing out sizes, forms, complicated interactions. It looked as if Basil himself was a fan of ship modeling.

“But wait,” Albina said, taking a closer look. “That’s Kir!”

“Yes,” Toivo said. “He came back for his model.”

“Kir is a kind boy,” Albina announced. “But his father behaved abominably... Hello, Kir!”

Engrossed, Kir only noticed her now. He stopped, and meekly said, “Good morning...” The animation disappeared from his face, as it did from Basil’s.

“How is your mother feeling?” Albina inquired.

“Thank you. She’s sleeping.”

“And your father? Where is your father, Kir? Is he here

somewhere?”

Kit silently shook his head and looked grim.

“Did you remain here the whole time?” Albina exclaimed delightedly, giving Toivo a triumphant look.

“He came back for his model,” Toivo reminded her.

“That doesn’t matter. You weren’t afraid to come back, were you, Kir?”

“Why be afraid of them, Grandma Albina?” Kir grumbled, trying to sidle around her.

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” Albina said peevishly. “But your father, for instance...”

“Father wasn’t the least bit frightened. Rather, he was afraid, but for Mama and for me. It’s just in all that excitement he didn’t see how kind they were...”

“Not kind, miserable!” Albina corrected him.

“They weren’t miserable, Grandma Albina!” Kir said indignantly, spreading his arms like an untrained tragedian. “They were merry; they wanted to play! They kept flipping around!”

Grandma Albina smiled condescendingly.

I can’t help stressing a circumstance that very accurately characterizes Toivo Glumov as a worker. If there had been a green probationer in his place, he would have decided that Duremar was trying to confuse things and that the picture in general was perfectly clear: Fleming created a new type of embryophore, his monsters had escaped, he could go off to sleep, and report in the morning.

An experienced worker — say, Sandro Mtbevari — would not have had coffee with Basil; embryophores of a new type were no joke. He would have immediately sent out twenty-five queries to every possible place, and he would have rushed down to Lower Pesha to grab the Fleming hooligans by the throat before they had a chance to come up with an alibi.

Toivo Glumov did not budge from the spot. Why not? He had smelled sulfur. Not even a smell, just a whiff. An unusual embryophore! Yes, of course, that’s serious. But that’s not the smell of sulfur. Hysterical panic? Closer, much warmer. But most

important — the strange old lady from cottage number 1. There! Panic, hysteria, escape, emergency squads, and she asks them to keep down the noise. Now that did not fall under traditional explanations. Toivo didn't even try to explain it. He simply waited for her to wake up to ask her a few questions. He waited, and he was rewarded. "If I hadn't thought of having a bite with Basil," he later told me, "if I had rushed off to report to you right after my interview with that Tolstov, I would have remained with the impression that nothing mysterious had taken place in Little Pesha, nothing except wild panic caused by an invasion of strange animals. But along came the boy Kir and Grandma Albina, and they brought an essential dissonance to the orderly but primitive scheme..."

"Thought of having a bite" was the way he put it. Probably so as not to waste time trying to put into words the vague and troubling sensations that had caused him to stay around.

LITTLE PESHA. THE SAME DAY. 8 AM.

Kir managed to stuff himself into the zero-cabin with the galley in his arms and vanished off to his Petrozavodsk. Basil took off his monstrous jacket, flopped down in the grass in the shade, and apparently dozed off. Grandma Albina floated off to her cottage number 1.

Toivo did not go back to the pavilion; he sat down on the grass, crossed his legs, and waited.

Nothing special was happening in Little Pesha. Cast-iron Jurgen bawled from time to time in his cottage, number 7 m- something about the weather, something about the river, and something about his vacation. Albina, still all in white, appeared on her veranda and sat down under the awning. Her voice, melodic and low, reached Toivo — she must have been talking on the videophone. "Duremar" Tolstov appeared in his field of vision several times. He was hanging around the cottages, crouching down, examining the ground, digging into the bushes, sometimes even crawling along.

At seven-thirty, Toivo got up, went into the club, and called his mother on the video. The usual check-in call. He was afraid that the day would be very busy and he wouldn't have another time to call. They talked about this and that. Toivo told her that he had met an aged ballerina named Albina. Could it be the Albina the Great; about whom he had heard so much in his childhood? They

discussed the question and decided that it was quite possible, and that there was also another great ballerina Albina, who was about fifty years older than Albina the Great... They said good-bye until the next day.

Outside came a loud roar: "The crawfish? Lev, what about the crawfish!"

Lev Tolstov was approaching the club at a fast pace, irritatedly waving his left arm; he was pressing a voluminous package to his chest with his right hand. At the entrance of the pavilion, he stopped, and with a squeaky falsetto called in the direction of cottage number 7: "I'll be back! Soon!" He noticed Toivo looking at him, and explained, as if in apology; "An extraordinarily strange story. I have to get to the bottom of it."

He went into the zero-cabin, and then nothing happened for quite some time. Toivo decided to wait until eight.

At five minutes to eight, a glider flew in over the woods, circled Little Pesha several times, gradually getting lower, and landed softly in front of cottage number 10, the one that seemed to be inhabited by an artist's family. A tall man jumped out of the glider, ran up the steps lightly, and, turning back to the glider, called: "Everything's all right! Nothing and no one!" While Toivo walked over across the square, a young woman with short hair in a violet dress above her knees got out of the glider. She did not go up to the porch; she stayed near the glider, holding the door with her hand.

As it turned out, the artist in the family was the woman, named Zosya Lyadova, and it was her self-portrait that Toivo had seen in the Yarygin cottage. She was twenty-five or twenty-six. She was a student at the Academy, in Komovsky Korsakov's studio, and had not created anything significant yet. She was beautiful — much more beautiful than in her self-portrait. In some way, she reminded Toivo of his Asya. Of course, he had never seen his Asya that scared.

The man's name was Oleg Olegovich Pankratov, and he was a lecturer in the Syktyvkar School District; before that, for almost thirty years, he had been an astroarchaeologist, working in Fokine's group, taking part in the expedition to Kala-i-Moog (a.k.a. the "paradoxical planet Morokhasi"), and in general had seen the world in all its shades. He was a very calm man, even phlegmatic, with

hands like shovels. Dependable, sturdy, substantial, you couldn't budge him with a bulldozer. His face was white and rosy-cheeked, with blue eyes, a potato nose, and reddish hair, like the mythic warrior Ilya Muromets...

And there was nothing strange in the fact that during the events of the night the spouses had behaved quite differently. The sight of living sacks trying to crawl into the bedroom window surprised Oleg Olegovich, but naturally did not scare him. Perhaps because he immediately thought of the branch institute in Lower Pesha, where he had been more than once, and the sight of monsters did not make him feel endangered. Disgusted, yes, but not threatened. Disgust and revulsion, but not fear. He barred the way and did not let the sacks into the bedroom. He pushed them back out into the garden, and they were slimy, sticky, and yucky. They were unpleasantly soft and spongy under his hands, and they reminded him of the innards of some huge animal. Then he moved around the bedroom trying to figure what to wipe his hands on, but Zosya began screaming on the veranda and he didn't have time to be fastidious...

Oh, none of us behaved very well, but still, you can't let yourself go like some people. Some of them are still in shock. Frolov had to be hospitalized right in Sula. They had to pull him out of the glider part by part; he had really lost it... Grigorian and family didn't even stay in Sula; they rushed into the zero-cabin, all four of them, and headed straight for Mirza-Charle. Grigorian shouted in farewell: "Anywhere, as long as it's far and forever!"

Zosya understood Grigorian very well. She had never experienced anything so horrible in her life. And it wasn't a question of whether the animals were dangerous or not. "If we were moved by horror... Don't interrupt, Oleg, I'm talking about us simple unprepared people, not thunder throwers like you... If we were all moved by terror, then it wasn't because we were afraid of being eaten, suffocated, and digested alive and so on... No, it was a different feeling!" Zosya was hard put to characterize that sensation more precisely. The closest she could get was that it wasn't horror but a feeling of total incompatibility, the impossibility of being in the same space with these creatures. But the most interesting part of her story was something else.

They were beautiful, the creatures! They were so horrible-looking

and revolting that they represented a kind of perfection — the perfection of ugliness. An esthetic clash between ideal ugliness and ideal beauty. Somewhere it was said that ideal ugliness should elicit the same esthetic sensations as ideal beauty. That had always seemed paradoxical to her until last night. But it wasn't a paradox! Or was she simply so perverse?..

She showed Toivo her sketches, made from memory two hours after the panic. She and Oleg had taken an empty little house in Sula, and at first Oleg made her drink tonic and tried psychomassage. But it didn't help. Then she grabbed a piece of paper, a disgusting marker, inflexible and clumsy, and hurriedly, line after line, shadow after shadow, began transferring onto paper what was before her eyes like a nightmare, blocking out the real world...

The drawings didn't show anything special. A spiderweb of lines, familiar objects: the veranda railing, table, bushes, and, above it all, blurry shadows of vague outlines. Of course, the drawings did elicit a feeling of anxiety, discomfort... Oleg Olegovich felt that there was something in them, even though everything was much simpler and more disgusting. Of course, he didn't know much about art. He just knew what he liked.

He asked Toivo what he had learned. Toivo told him his suppositions: Fleming, Lower Pesha, a new form of embryophore, and so on. Pankratov nodded in agreement, and then said with sadness that the thing that grieved him most in this business... how could he put it? Well, the excessive nervousness of today's earthier. They all ran off, all of them! At least one would have stayed, have shown a little curiosity... Toivo sprang to the defense of today's earth-dweller and told them about Grandma Albina and the boy Kir.

Oleg Olegovich grew incredibly animated. He slapped his shovel-like hands on the armrests of the chair and on the table, looked triumphantly at Toivo and at Zosya, and, laughing, exclaimed: "Go, Kir! What a hero! I always said something would come of him... But what about our Albina! So much for hoity-toity!" Zosya pointed out that there was nothing amazing about it, that old and young were always berries from the same patch... "And space travelers, my beloved!" They parried, half-seriously, half-jokingly, when suddenly a minor incident occurred.

Oleg Olegovich; listening to his beloved with a grin from ear to ear, suddenly stopped smiling, and his expression became one of concern, as if something had shaken his very foundations. Toivo looked and saw that the inconsolable and disappointed Ernst Jurgen was standing in the doorway of his cottage number 7, no longer in his crab-catching wet suit, but in a beige outfit with a flat can of beer in one hand and a colossal sandwich with something red and white in the other, and he was bringing first one hand and then the other to his mouth, chewing and swallowing, and staring across the square at the club.

“There’s Ernst!” Zosya exclaimed. “And you said everyone left!”

“Amazing!” Oleg Olegovich said slowly with that same worried look.

“Ernst, as you see, also was not frightened off,” Zosya said, not without malice.

“I see,” Oleg Olegovich replied.

He knew something about that Ernst Jurgen, and he had never expected him to be here after last night. He shouldn’t have been here now, on his own veranda, drinking beer and eating boiled crawcrabs. No, Ernst Jurgen should have hightailed it back to Titan or even farther.

And Toivo hurried to set things straight, and told them that Ernst Jurgen had not been in the village last night, that he had been fishing several kilometers upriver. Zosya was very disappointed, and Oleg Olegovich, as it seemed to Toivo Glumov, even sighed in relief.

“That’s another story!” he said. “You should have said so in the first place...” And even though no one had asked him any questions, he suddenly began explaining: he had been confused, because last night during the panic he had seen Ernst Jurgen pushing everyone aside to get to the pavilion and the zero-cabin. Now he realized that he was mistaken, that it hadn’t happened, and couldn’t have. But at first, when he saw Ernst Jurgen with a can of beer...

It’s not clear whether Zosya believed him or not, but Toivo didn’t believe a word of it. It hadn’t happened; Ernst hadn’t appeared to Oleg Olegovich during the panic. But Oleg Olegovich did know

something about Jurgen, something more interesting, but apparently bad, because he was too embarrassed to tell it.

And here a shadow fell on Little Pesha, and the air was filled with a velvety cooing, and Basil came shooting out from behind the pavilion like a shot, pulling on his jacket as he ran, and the sun was shining once more over Little Pesha, and a pseudograf of the Puma class, a super new one, majestically landed on the square, without bending a blade of grass, all golden and shiny, like a gigantic round loaf of bread, and immediately all its round portholes flew open, and through them scattered dozens of long-legged, tanned, busy, and loud-voiced men — they scattered and began dragging crates with funnels, pulled hoses with bizarre tips, ran around, waving their arms, and the one who bustled, ran, and waved his arms the most, dragging crates and pulling hoses, was Lev-Duremar Tolstov, still wearing clothing covered with dried green seaweed.

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF THE UE DEPT. 6 MAY 99. AROUND 1:00 P.M.

“And what did they achieve with their technology?” I asked.

Toivo was looking drearily out the window, his gaze following the Cloud Settlement, unhurriedly floating somewhere over the southern suburbs of Sverdlovsk.

“Nothing essentially new,” he replied. “They re-created the most probable appearance of the animals. Their analyses were the same as those of the emergency squad. They were amazed that the embryophore shells had not remained. They were astonished by the energy and insisted that it was impossible.”

“Did you send the queries?” I made myself ask.

I have to stress here once more that by then I already saw it all, knew it all, understood it all, but I had no idea what I could do with my vision, knowledge, and understanding. I couldn't come up with anything, and my colleagues and coworkers were simply in my way. Especially Toivo Glumov.

More than anything in the world, I wanted to go on vacation right there, without leaving my chair. Send them all on vacation, every last probationer, and then cut off all communications lines, shut down the screens, shut my eyes, and be completely alone at least for twenty-four hours. So that I would not have to watch my

face. So I would not have to think when my words. sounded natural and when they sounded strange. So that I wouldn't have to think about anything, so that there would be a gaping emptiness in my head, and then the right vision would appear on its own in that emptiness. It was like a hallucination — one of those that come when you have to bear nagging pain. I had borne it for more than five weeks, and my spiritual strength was waning. But for the time being I still could control my face, manage my behavior, and ask totally appropriate questions.

“Did you send the queries?” I asked Toivo Glumov.

“I sent the queries,” he replied in a monotone. “To Burgermayer at Embryomechanics. To Gorbatsky. Personally. And to Fleming. Just in case. All in your name.”

“Fine,” I said. “We'll wait.”

Now I had to let him talk it out. I could see he needed to talk. He had to make sure that the most important thing was not missed by the chief. Ideally, the chief should have noticed and stressed that important thing himself, but I didn't have the strength for that anymore.

“Do you want to add anything?” I asked.

“Yes, I do.” He flicked an invisible mote of dust from the desk “Unusual technology is not the main thing. The main thing is the dispersion of reactions.”

“That is?” I had to hurry him along, too!

“You might have noticed that these events divided up the witnesses into two uneven groups. Strictly speaking, into three. The majority of witnesses gave in to uncontrollable panic. Me devil in a medieval village. Total loss of self-control. People ran from Little Pesha. People ran from Earth. Now the second group: zoo technician Anatoly Sergeevich and artist Zosya Lyadova, though frightened at first, find the strength to return, and the artist had even seen something charming in the creatures. And finally, the elderly ballerina and Kir. And, I suppose, Pankratov, Lyadova's husband They weren't frightened at all. On the contrary. Dispersion of reactions,” he repeated.

I saw what he wanted from me. All the conclusions were on the space. Someone had run an experiment on artificial selection in

Little Pesha, dividing up people, according to their reactions, into those who are worthy of something. Just as that someone made a selection fifteen years ago in the subspace sector at entrance 41/02. And there was no question as to who that someone with the technology unknown to us was. The same one who for some reason blocked the path of fukamization... Toivo Glumov could have formulated all that for me himself, but from his point of view it would have been a violation of work ethics and the principle of it. Drawing a conclusion was the prerogative of the chief and the senior member of the clan.

But I did not use my prerogative. I didn't have the strength for that, either.

"Dispersions," I repeated. "That's convincing."

I must have sounded a false note, because Toivo suddenly raised his white lashes and stared at me.

"Is that all?" I asked immediately.

"Yes," he replied. "That's it."

"Fine. Let's wait for the experts' results. What are you planning to do now? Go to bed?"

He sighed. Barely perceptibly. A less controlled person in his place would have been insolent. But Toivo said, "I don't know. I'll probably go do some more work I have to finish the head count today."

"The whales?"

"Yes."

"Fine," I said. "Whatever you want. But tomorrow, please leave for Kharkov."

Toivo's white eyebrows went up, but he said nothing.

"Do you know what the Institute of Eccentrics is?" I asked.

"Yes. Kikin told me."

Now I raised my brows. Mentally. Damn them all. They were out of control. Did I have to warn each one every time to watch his tongue? This wasn't COMCON-2 but a clubhouse...

"And what did Kikin tell you?"

"That it's a branch of the Institute of Metapsychic Research. They

study the limits and beyond the limits of the human psyche. It's chock full of weird people."

"Right," I said. "You're going there tomorrow. Listen to your assignment."

I formulated his assignment this way. On March 25, the Institute of Eccentrics in Kharkov was honored by the presence of the famous Wizard from the planet Saraksh. Who was the Wizard? He was without a doubt a mutant. Moreover, he was the lord and master of all mutants in the radioactive jungles beyond Blue Snake. He had many amazing abilities, including the fact that he was a psychocrat. What was a psychocrat? That was the general term for creatures capable of subordinating someone else's psyche. Besides which, the Wizard was a creature of extraordinary intellectual power, one of those sapiens who need no more than a drop of water to conclude the existence of oceans. The Wizard came to Earth on a private visit. For some reason the thing that interested him most was the Institute of Eccentrics. Perhaps he sought others like him; we don't know. The visit was planned for four days, but he left after an hour. He went back to Saraksh and vanished in his radioactive jungles.

Up until that point, my introduction to Toivo Glumov was the truth and nothing but the truth. Now came the pseudoquasi part.

During the last month, our Progressors on Saraksh at my request have been trying to enter into communications with the Wizard. They have been failing. Either we had insulted the Wizard somehow here on Earth, without knowing it, or one hour was enough for him to get the needed information about us. Or else something happened that was specifically 'Wizardy' and therefore unimaginable for us. In short, he had to go to the Institute, find all the materials on the study of the Wizard, if there were any, talk to everyone who dealt with him, and find out if anything strange had happened to the Wizard. For instance, did they remember anything he might have said about Earth and about people? Did he commit any acts that passed without notice then but were now seen in a new light?

"Is everything clear?" I asked.

He gave me another quick look.

"You did not say which theme my trip falls under."

No, it wasn't a flash of intuition. And I doubt that he had caught me pseudoquasying. He simply could not understand how his chief, who had such serious information relating to the penetration of his hated Wanderers, could get sidetracked.

I said, "It's the same theme. A Visit from an Old Lady."

(Actually, it really was. In the broad meaning of the word. The broadest.)

For some time, he was silent, noiselessly drumming his fingers on the desk. Then he spoke, almost apologetically.

"I don't see the connection..."

"You will," I promised.

He said nothing.

"And if there is no connection, all the better," I said.

"He's a Wizard, understand? A real Wizard, I know him. A real Wizard from fairy tales, with a talking bird on his shoulder and all the other accoutrements. And he's a Wizard from another planet, yet. I desperately need him!"

"A possible ally," Tolvo added with a weak interrogative intonation.

There, he explained it to himself. Now he would work like the damned. Maybe he would even find the Wizard, which, to tell the truth, I doubted.

"Bear in mind," I said, "that in Kharkov you will represent yourself as a worker of the Big COMCON. That's not a cover; Big COMCON really is looking for the Wizard."

"All right," he said.

"Is that it? Then go. Go, go. My best to Asya."

He left, and at last I was alone. For several blissful minutes. Until the next videophone call. And in those blissful moments I decided for sure: I had to go to Athos. Immediately, because once he went in for surgery, I would have no one nearby to whom I could go.

COMCON-2 Sverdlovsk To Kammerer. Director of the Biocenter TPO Gorbatsky.

In answer to your query of 6 May You are being led by the nose. Such a thing cannot be. Pay it no mind.

Gorbatsky

[End of Document 5.]

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DOCUMENT 6:

Fleming to Kammerer

Maxim!

I know everything about the incident in Little Pesha. The case, in my opinion, is extraordinary and enviable. Your boys posed very precise questions, which we should all answer. That's what I'm doing, dropping everything else. When something becomes dear, I'll be sure to let you know.

Fleming

Lower Pesha. 15:30

P.S. Maybe you've learned something through our channels? If you have, let me know immediately. For the next three days, I'll be in Lower Pesha.

P.P.S. Could it be the Wanderers after all? Damn it, wouldn't that be fine!

Kammerer

[End of Document 6]

DOCUMENT 7:

Burgermayer to Kammerer

The EMBRYOMECHANICS Manufacturing Society Directorate
Earth, Antarctic Region, Erebus A 18/03/62 Index: O/T: KK 946239
Code: SKTs-76

BURGERMAYER, ADOLF-ANNA, GENERAL DIRECTOR S-283, 7
May 99

To: COMCON-2 Urals-North, EU Department Code: SR3-23

CHIEF OF ACCIDENT DEPARTMENT M. KAMMERER

Contents: Reply to your query of 6 May 99.

Dear Kammerer!

Regarding the characteristics of modern embryophores that interest you, I can report the following:

1. The general mass of exuded biomechanisms is up to 200 kg. Their maximum number is 8. The maximal size of a single unit can be determined by the program $102 \text{ ASTA}/M, R, R_{sh} K/$, where M is the mass of the original material, R the density of the material, R_{sh} the density of the environment, and 1 the number of exuded mechanisms. The correlation with high accuracy is performed in temperature ranges between 200 and 400 K and in pressure ranges of 0 to 200 SE.

2. The time for the development of the embryophore is an uncharacteristic number that depends on many parameters, which are all totally under the control of the initiator. However, for the fastest-acting embryophores there is a lower limit of time for development, which is approximately one minute.

3. The time of existence of now-known biomechanisms depends on their individual mass. The critical mass of a biomechanism is $M_0 = 12 \text{ Kg}$. Biomechanisms whose mass M does not exceed M_0 , theoretically have limitless life spans. The time of existence for biomechanisms with a greater mass decreases with the growth of mass on the exponent, so that the time of existence of massive models (around 100 kg) cannot exceed several seconds.

4. The goal of creating a fully dissolving embryophore has existed a long time, but unfortunately it is still far from being resolved. Even the most modern technology is helpless to create shells that could fully become part of the development cycle.

5. Microscopic biomechanisms in general have high mobility (up to 1,000 times their own size per minute). As for 6led models, the record holder for now is model KS-3, “Hoppity,” which can develop directed and stimulated speeds of up to 5 m/sec.

6. It can be maintained with complete accuracy that any of the existing biomechanisms will react acutely and unambivalently (negatively) to a natural biofield. That is built into the genetic system of every biomechanism — and not out of ethical considerations, as one might think, but because any natural biofield with an intensity of more than 0.63 GD (the biofield of a kitten) creates irreparable glitzes in the signaling network of a biomechanism.

7. Regarding energy balance, the release of embryophores or biomechanisms with the parameters described in your query would undoubtedly have led to a violent release of energy (an explosion), if the picture you described is at all possible. However, that picture, as follows from what was written above, is totally fantastic given the present level of scientific and technological capabilities.

Respectfully,

General Director Burgermayer

[End of Document 7]

DOCUMENT 8:

Glumov Memorandum: Theme 009: “A Visit From an Old Lady”

COMCON-2 to Kammerer. From Fleming

REPORT COMCON-2 No.016/99 Urals-North

Date: 8 May 99

FROM: T. Glumov, Inspector

THEME: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

RE: The visit of the Wizard (Saraksh) to the Kharkov branch of the Institute of Metapsychic Research (Institute of Eccentrics)

In accordance with your orders, yesterday morning I arrived at the Kharkov branch of the Institute of Eccentrics. The deputy director of the branch, Logovenko, gave me an appointment at ten; however, I was not brought into his office immediately, but was subjected first to a check up in a chamber of sliding frequency KSCH-S, also called “How To Catch an Eccentric.” It turns out that every new visitor to the institute is subjected to that procedure. The aim is to discover the person’s “latent metapsychic capabilities” — in other words, the so-called hidden eccentricity.

At 10:15, I presented myself to the deputy director for communications with public organizations.

(Logovenko, Daniil Alexandrovich, doctor of psychology, corresponding member of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Europe. Born September 18, 30 in Borispol. Education: Institute of Psychology, Kiev; Control Department, Kiev U.; special course in higher and anomalous etology, Split; Basic works — in the area of metapsychology, discovered the Logovenko Impulse, a.k.a. “t-spike mentogram.” One of the founders of the Kharkov branch of the Institute of Metapsychic Research.)

D. Logovenko told me that he personally had met the Wizard in the morning of March 25 on the cosmodrome at Mirza-Charle and accompanied him right into the Institute building. With them were the department head Bogdan Gaidai and the Wizard’s escort from COMCON-1, Borya Laptev, whom we know.

Arriving at the Institute, the Wizard declined the traditional reception and expressed a desire immediately to begin getting to know the work of the Institute and their clients. Then D. Logovenko turned over the Wizard to the care of B. Gaidai and never talked to the Wizard again.

I: What was the Wizard's goal at the Institute, in your opinion?

LOGOVENKO: The Wizard didn't say anything about it to me. COMCON informed us that the Wizard allegedly wanted to familiarize himself with our work, and we were glad to offer him that opportunity. Not without our own interest, by the way: we hoped to study him. We had never worked on a psychocrat of such power, and from another planet to boot.

I: What did your study show?

LOGOVENKO: We did not study him. The Wizard cut short his visit totally unexpectedly.

I: Why do you suppose he did that?

LOGOVENKO: We are lost in conjecture. Personally, here is what I think He was introduced to Michel Desmond, a polymental. And the Wizard noted something in Michel that slipped past us. And whatever it was either frightened him or insulted him, in a word, shocked him so much that he no longer wanted to deal with us. Don't forget, he's a psychocrat, an intellectual, but by birth, upbringing, and worldview, if you like, he's a typical savage.

I: I don't quite understand. What is a polymental?

LOGOVENKO: Polymentalism is a very rare metapsychic phenomenon, the existence in one human organism of two or more independent consciousnesses. Don't confuse it with schizophrenia; it's not pathological. For instance, our Michel Desmond. He is an absolutely healthy, very pleasant young man, manifesting no deviations from the norm. But a decade ago, quite accidentally, it was discovered that he had a double mentogram. One was ordinary, human, simply related to the past and present life of Michel. But the other one was discovered at a specific, strictly precise depth of mentoscopy. This is a mentogram of a creature that had nothing to do with Michel, living in a world which we have not been able to identify. Apparently, it is a world of incredibly large pressures and high temperatures... But that's inessential. The important thing is

that Michel has no idea about that world, or about that cohabiting consciousness, and that creature has no idea about Michel or our world. So this is what I think: we managed to discover a neighboring existence in Michel; but what if there are others in him, beyond the limits of our methods of discovery, and they shocked the Wizard?

I: This Desmond's second world doesn't shock you?

LOGOVENKO: I get your point. No. Not at all. But I must tell you that the mentoscopist who first looked into the world experienced a profound shock. Primarily because he thought that Michel was a secret agent for the Wanderers, a Progressor from an alien world.

I: How did you determine that this wasn't the fact?

LOGOVENKO: You can relax on that score. There is no correlation between Michel's behavior and the functioning of the second consciousness. The neighboring consciousnesses of a polymental do not interact. In principle, they cannot interact, because they function in different planes. Here is a crude analogy. Imagine a shadow show. The shadows projected on the screen cannot interact. Of course, there are various fantastic ideas, but they are merely fantastic.

My conversation with D. Logovenko ended here, and I was introduced to B. A. Gaidai.

(Gaidai, Bogdan Arkhipovich, master of psychology. Born June 10, 55 in Middle Buda. Education: Institute of Psychology, Kiev; special courses in higher and anomalous etology, Split; Basic works in the metapsychology. Since 89 has been working in the Department of Psychoprognoistics, since 93 head of the laboratory of Instrument Control, since 94 chief of the Department of Intrapsychic Technology.)

An excerpt from the conversation:

I: In your opinion, what interested the Wizard most at the Institute?

GAIDAI: You know, I have the impression that the Wizard had been misinformed. It's not surprising; even here on Earth many people don't understand our work, so what can you say about the Progressors with whom the Wizard deals in Saraksh? I remember that I was immediately surprised that the Wizard, an

extraterrestrial, wanted to see only our institute out of the whole planet Earth... I think this is why. Back on Saraksh he is king of the mutants, so to speak, and he, probably has many problems as a result: they degenerate, get sick, they need treatment, support. While our “eccentrics” are also a type of mutant, and he imagined that he could pick up useful information at the Institute, he probably thought we had something like a clinic here.

I: And seeing his mistake, he turned and left?

GAIDAI: Exactly. He turned a bit too sharply, I guess and left a little too fast. But after all, maybe that's how they behave there.

I: What did you talk about with him?

GAIDAI: We didn't talk about anything. I only heard his voice once. I asked him what he would like to see, and he replied, “Everything you'll show me.” His voice, I might add, was rather repulsive, like that of a crotchety witch.

I: By the way, what language did you speak?

GAIDAI: Just imagine, Ukrainian!

According to Gaidai, the Wizard met only three clients at the Institute. I've managed to speak with two of them.

Ravich, Marina Sergeyevna, age 27, a veterinarian by education, now a consultant to the Leningrad Embryosystem Factory, the Lausanne Workroom on Realizing P-abstractions, the Belgrade Institute of Laminary Positronics, and the chief architect of the Yakutsk Region. A modest, very shy and sad woman. She has a unique and still unexplained ability. (They haven't even given this ability a scientific name yet.) If you set a clearly formulated problem that she can understand before her, she begins to solve it passionately and with pleasure, but as a result, completely beyond her control, obtains the answer to another problem, which has absolutely nothing to do with the problem at hand and which, as a rule, is beyond her professional interests. The posed problem acts as a catalyst on her consciousness to solve another problem, which she either glanced at in some popular scientific journal or accidentally overheard in the conversation of specialists. It is impossible to determine ahead of time which problem she will solve; there is something like the Classic Uncertainty principle in physics at work here. The Wizard came to her office at the moment when she was

working. She vaguely remembers his ugly, large-headed figure, dressed in green, and has no other impressions of the Wizard. No, he didn't say anything. Bogdan made the usual noises about her "gift," and she didn't remember any other voices. According to Gaidai, the Wizard was there for only two minutes, and she did not interest him any more than he had her.

Michel Desmond, 41, a granular engineer by education, a professional athlete, European tunnel hockey champion for 88. A jolly man, very pleased with himself and the world. He treats his polymentalism with humor and total indifference. He was on his way to the stadium when they brought in the Wizard. The Wizard, according to him, looked sickly and was silent, didn't get jokes; he probably didn't understand where he was and what was being said. Of course, there was an instant — which Michel will remember for the rest of his life — when the Wizard raised his huge pale eyelids and looked right into Michel's soul, or maybe even deeper, into the bowels of the world where the creature lives with whom Michel must share his mental space. That was an unpleasant but astonishing moment. Soon after that the Wizard left, without even saying a word. Or good-bye.

Susumu Hirota, a.k.a. Senrigan, which means "He who sees a thousand miles," 83, religion historian, professor of the religious history at Bangkok University. I did not manage to speak with him. He will return to the institute tomorrow or the day after. According to Gaidai, the Wizard did not like chat clairvoyant at all. At least, it is known that the Wizard exited precisely during their meeting.

According to all the witnesses, the exit looked like this. The Wizard had been standing in the middle of the mentoscopy room, listening while Gaidai lectured him on the extraordinary abilities of Senrigan, while Senrigan interrupted the lecturer from time to time with exposure of the lecturer's personal circumstances, and suddenly, without a word, without a warning gesture or glance, that green gomne turned sharply, bumped into Borya Laptev with his elbow, walked down the corridors at a fast clip, without stopping anywhere for a second, toward the exit. That was it.

Several other people had seen the Wizard at the Institute: scientific workers, lab assistants, and a few of the administrative personnel. None of them knew whom they were looking at. And only two newcomers to the Institute paid any attention to the

Wizard, stunned by his looks. I did not learn anything of significance from them.

Then I met with Boris Laptev. Here it the most important part of our conversation:

I: You're the only man who was with the Wizard all the time from Saraksh to Saraksh. Did you notice anything strange?

BORIS: A fine question! You know, that's like when they asked the camel why his neck was crooked. And he said, "What do I have that's straight?"

I: Still. Try to recall his behavior for that whole period. Something must have happened to make him kick up a fuss.

BORIS: Listen, I've known the Wizard for two of our years. He is an inexhaustible creature. I gave up a long, long time ago and don't even try to figure him out. What can I tell you? He had a depression that day, as I call it. From time to time, it comes upon him without any visible causes. He grows taciturn, and if he does open his mouth, it's only to my something nasty. That's how it was that day. While we were flying in from Saraksh, everything was fine, he intoned aphorisms, joked with me, even hummed... But by the time we reached Mirza-Charle he grew grim, almost didn't talk at all with Logovenko, and when we started going around the Institute with Gaidai, he was blacker than a thundercloud. I was afraid that he would insult someone, but he must have felt that he couldn't go on like that, and fled from temptation. He was silent all the way back to Saraksh. He did look around in Mirza-Charle as if in farewell, and in a disgusting, whiny voice he squeaked: "He sees mountains and forests, clouds and skies, but he doesn't see what's right under his nose."

I: What's that supposed to mean?

BORIS: Children's verse. Ancient.

I: How did you interpret it?

BORIS: I didn't. I saw that he was mad at the world, he was ready to bite. I saw that I had to keep quiet. He and I didn't utter a word all the way back.

I: And that's it?

BORIS: That's it. Just before landing, he muttered, "Neither fish

nor fowl. Let's wait for the blind to see the seeing." And when we got out in Blue Snake, he waved good bye and, as they say, vanished into the jungle. He didn't thank me, by the way, or invite me to his place.

I: You can't tell me anything more?

BORIS: What do you want from me? Yes, there was something that really displeased him on Earth. But he didn't deign to tell me what. I'm telling you he is an inexplicable and unpredictable creature. It may not have anything to do with Earth at all. Maybe he just had stomach ache that day — in the broad sense of the word, of course, in a very broad sense, a cosmic one...

I: You think it's not a coincidence that someone doesn't see anything in the child's poem and then the line about the blind and seeing?

BORIS: You see, the stuff about the blind and the seeing is a saying on Saraksh. Like "on a cold day in August" or "once in a blue moon." He must have wanted to say that something would never happen. And the poem came from general nastiness. He quoted it with obvious sarcasm; I just don't know what he was mocking. Maybe that boring, bragging Jap.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS:

1. I could not obtain any data that could help find the Wizard on Saraksh.

2. I cannot give any recommendations for continuing the search.

T. Glumov

[End of Document 8]

DOCUMENT 9:

Narrative: Toivo Glumov and the Wanderers

On the evening of May 6, I was seen by our President, Athos-Sidorov. I took along the most interesting materials, and I gave him the essence of the matter and my proposals, orally. He was very sick by then, his face was sallow, and he was short of breath. I had put off this visit too long: he didn't have the strength to be truly amazed. He said that he would familiarize himself with the materials, think it over, and call me tomorrow.

I spent all of May 7 in my office, waiting for his call. He did not call. In the evening, I was told that he had suffered a severe attack, had barely been revived, and was now in the hospital. Once again, everything was dumped on my shoulders, and so hard that the poor little bones of my soul cracked.

On May 8, I received — among other things — Toivo's report on his visit to the Institute of Eccentrics. I checked off his name, entered his report in the registrator, and began cooking up an assignment for Petya Siletsky. By then, only Petya Siletsky and Zaya Momzova from my staff had not been to the Institute.

At approximately that time in his room, Toivo Glumov was talking to Grisha Serosovin. I bring a reconstruction of their conversation below, primarily to demonstrate the mind-set of my coworkers at that time. But only in terms of quality. In terms of quantity, the relationship was the same: on one side there was only Toivo Glumov, and on the other, all the rest.

U.E. DEPARTMENT, ROOM D. 8 May 99. EVENING.

Grisha Serosovin walked in, as usual, without knocking, stopped in the doorway, and asked, "May I come in?"

Toivo put aside Vertical Progress (the work by the anonymous K Oxovu), bent his head, and looked over at Grisha.

"You may. But I'm going home very soon."

"Is Sandro out again?"

Toivo looked at Sandro's desk. The desk was empty and impeccably clean.

"Yes. Third day."

Grisha sat down at Sandro's desk and crossed his legs.

"Where were you yesterday?" he asked.

"Kharkov."

"Ah, so you've been to Kharkov, too!"

"Who else?"

"Almost everyone. In the last month, almost the entire department's been in Kharkov. Listen, Toivo, here's why I dropped by. You've worked on 'sudden geniuses,' right?"

"Yes. A long time ago. The year before last."

"Do you remember Soddi?"

"I do. Bartholomew Soddi: A mathematician who became a confessor."

"That's the one," Grisha said. "In the summary, there is a phase. I quote: 'According to our information, B. Soddi suffered a personal tragedy before his metamorphosis.' If you compiled the summary, I have two questions for you. What was the tragedy? And where did you get the data?"

Toivo reached out and called up his program on the screen. The selection of information was over, and the counting was on. With unhurried movements, Toivo started clearing off his desk. Grisha waited patiently. B was used to it.

"If it says 'according to our information,' " Toivo said, "that means I got it from Big Bug."

He fell silent. Grisha waited some more, recrossed his legs, and said, "I don't want to bother the Big Bug with these thrills. All right, I'll try to manage without... Listen, Toivo, doesn't it seem to you that our Big Bug has been kind of nervous lately?"

Toivo shrugged.

"Maybe," he said. "The President is very bad. They say Gorbovsky is near death. And he knows them all. He knows them all well."

Grisha said thoughtfully: "By the way, I know Gorbovsky too; how about that. You remember... though I guess that was before

your time... Kamill had committed suicide. The last of the Devil's Dozen. The whole Devil's Dozen case was really nothing to you, either... just something that made the air tremble. For instance, I had never heard of him... Well, the fact of suicide, though it would be more accurate to say self-destruction, Kamill's suicide did not elicit any doubts. But it wasn't clear why. That is, it was clear that his life wasn't a bed of roses; the last hundred years of his life he had been completely alone. You and I can't even imagine such loneliness. But that's not what I was talking about. Big Bug sent me to Gorbovsky then, because, it seemed, Gorbovsky had been close to Kamill in his day and had even tried to give him some affection... Are you listening?"

Toivo nodded several times. "Yes," he said.

"Do you know how you look?"

"I do," Toivo said. "I look like a man who is concentrating on something private. You've told me that before. Several times. A cliché. Don't you agree?"

Instead of an answer, Grisha pulled a pen out of his breast pocket and threw it right at Toivo's head — like a spear — across the room. Toivo pulled the pen out of the air with two fingers a few centimeters from his face and said, "Feeble."

"Feeble," he wrote with the pen on the piece of paper in front of him.

"You're sparing me, sire," he said. "And you shouldn't spare me. It's bad for me."

"You see, Toivo," Grisha said, "I know that you have good reflexes. Not brilliant, no, but good; the sturdy reaction of a professional. But your appearance... You must realize that as your subksu coach I feel it is my duty from time to time to check whether you can still react to your surroundings or whether you really are in a cataleptic state."

"I'm tired today," Toivo said. "When my program is finished with the tally, I'll go home."

"What do you have there?" Grisha asked.

"I have there ... whales. I have there birds. I have lemmings, rats, field mice. I have many small creatures."

“And what are they doing there?”

“They’re perishing. Or fleeing. They’re dying, throwing themselves onto shore, drowning themselves, flying away from places where they have lived for centuries.”

“Why?”

“No one knows. Two or three centuries ago, it was a usual phenomenon, even though they did not understand why it was happening. Then it did not occur for a long time. At all. And now it’s started again.”

“Wait,” said Grisha “It’s all very interesting, of course, but what do we have to do with it?”

Toivo was silent, and, without waiting for an answer, Grisha asked, “Do you think it might have something to do with the Wanderers?”

Toivo diligently examined the pen, turned it in his fingers, picked it up by one end and held it up to the light.

“Everything we can’t explain might have something to do with the Wanderers.”

“Ironical formula,” Grisha said in awe.

“And it might not,” Toivo adds “Where do you get such nice things? You’d think it’s just a pen. What could be more banal? But it’s a pleasure to look at your pen... You know, why don’t you give it to me. And I’ll give it to Asya. I want to make her happy. At least in some way.”

“And you’ll make you happy at least in some way,” Grisha said.

“And you’ll make me happy.”

“Take it,” Grisha said. “It’s yours. Give it away, present it, make up a lie. That you bought it for your beloved, that you stayed up nights making it.”

“Thanks,” Toivo said, and put it in his pocket.

“But bear that in mind!” Grisha raised a warning anger. “Right around the corner, on Red Maple Street, there is a vending machine from the studio of a certain F. Moran, and it chums out pens like that as fast as people can put money in.”

Toivo took the pen out and examined it again.

"It doesn't matter," he said sadly. "You noticed the vending machine, but it would never occur to me to notice it..."

"But you've noticed disorder in the world of whales!"

"Whales!" Toivo wrote down.

"By the way," he said. "You're a fresh mind, unprejudiced. What do you think? What do you think must have happened to make a herd of whales — tame, cared for, spoiled — suddenly, just like in the bad old days, beach themselves and die? Silently, without calling for help, with their cubs... Can you imagine any reason at all for that suicide?"

"Why did they do it before?"

"Why they did it before is also unknown. But back then, one could conjecture. Whales were tormented by parasites, they were attacked by swallows and squids, they were attacked by people... There was even a theory that they were killing themselves as a protest. But today!"

"What do specialists say?"

"The specialists sent a query to COMCON-1: to determine the cause of the reactivated incidents of suicide in whales."

"Hmmm. I see. What do the shepherds say?"

"It all started with the shepherds. They maintain that it's blind horror that makes the whales kill themselves. And the shepherds just can't imagine what today's whales have to fear."

"Hmmm," Grisha said. "It looks like you really can't get by without the Wanderers in this case."

"Can't get by," wrote Tolvo, drew a box around the words, and then another one, and started filling in the space between them.

"But on the other hand," Grisha went on, "it's all happened before, over and over. We lose ourselves in conjectures, blame the Wanderers, twist our brains, and then we look and — bah! — who's that familiar figure on the horizon of events? Who's that so elegant and with the proud smile of the Lord God on the evening of the sixth day of creation? Whose familiar snow-white Van Dyke beard is that? Mister Fleming, sir! Where do you come from! What are you doing here? Won't you step on the carpet, sir? To the World Council, the Extraordinary Tribunal?"

“You must agree that wouldn’t be the worst thing,” Toivo noted.

“Not at all! Though sometimes it seems to me that I would prefer to deal with dozens of Wanderers rather than one Fleming. Of course, that’s probably because the Wanderers are almost hypothetical creatures, while Fleming with his beard is a totally real beast. Depressingly real, with his snow-white beard, his Lower Pesha, his scientific bandits, his damned world fame!”

“I can see that his beard really bugs you...”

“His beard is one the few things that doesn’t,” Grisha countered acidly. “We could grab him by that beard. But how will we grab the Wanderers, if it turns out to be them?”

Toivo neatly put away the pen, got up, and stood by the window. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Grisha watching him carefully, his feet firmly planted on the floor and even leaning forward. It was quiet, the display of the terminal beeping softly in rhythm to the count.

“Or are you hoping that it’s not them?” Grisha asked.

Toivo did not answer for some time, and then he spoke without turning.

“Now I don’t hope.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s them.”

Grisha narrowed his eyes.

“What do you mean?”

Toivo turned to him.

“I’m certain that the Wanderers are on Earth and are active.”

Grisha later said that at that moment he felt a very unpleasant shock. He had a feeling that the whole scene was unreal. Everything here depended on the personality of Toivo Glumov. The words of Toivo Glumov were very difficult to connect to Toivo Glumov’s personality. The words could not be a joke, because Toivo never joked about the Wanderers. Toivo’s words could not be considered hasty, because Toivo never spoke hastily. And the words certainly could not be the truth, because they could not be the truth. Of course, Toivo could be mistaken...

Grisha asked in a tense voice: "Does the Big Bug know?"

"I've reported all the facts to him."

"And?"

"As you see, for now, nothing," Toivo said.

Grisha relaxed and leaned back in his chair.

"You're simply mistaken," he said in relief.

Toivo was silent.

"Damn you!" Grisha cried. "You frightened me to death with your gloomy fantasies! It was like being plunged into ice water!"

Toivo was silent. He turned back to the window. Grisha groaned, grabbed the tip of his nose, and, grimacing, performed circular contortions with it.

"No," he said. "I'm not like you, that's the problem. I can't do it. It's too serious. The whole thing repulses me. It's not a personal issue; I believe, and the rest of you can do what you want. If I were to believe that, I would have to drop everything else, sacrifice everything I have, reject everything... be shriven, in effect, damn it! But our life is multivarianted! How can you just make it fit one mold only? Though, of course, sometimes I feel ashamed and afraid, and then I regard you with special awe and delight... But sometimes — like now, for instance — I get mad just looking at you ... at your self-flagellation, your martyred obsession... And then I want to joke, to mock you, to laugh off everything you hold before us..."

"Listen," Toivo said, "what do you want from me?"

Grisha said nothing. "Really," he muttered at last. "What do I want from you? I don't know."

"But I do. You want everything to be good and better every day."

"Yep."

Grisha wanted to add something, something light and funny that would smooth over the awkward intimacy that had arisen between them in the last few minutes, but the computer signaled the end of the program, and the printer began pushing out the paper in short bursts.

Toivo looked at the whole thing, line by line, neatly folded it on

the perforations, and stuck it in the storage memory slot.

“Anything interesting?” Grisha asked with sympathy.

“What can I say ...” Toivo muttered. He really was thinking hard about something else. “It’s the spring of 81 all over again.”

“What do you mean, all over again?”

Toivo ran his fingers over the terminal’s sensor, starting the next top of instructions.

“In March 81,” he said, “after two hundred years, was the first recorded incident of mass suicide of gray whales.”

“So,” Grisha said impatiently. “But why all over again?”

Toivo got up.

“It’s a long story,” he said. “You’ll read the report later. Let’s go home.”

TOIVO GLUMOV AT HOME. 8 May 99. Late Evening

They ate dinner in a room crimson with sunset. Asya was in a bad mood. Pashkovsky’s yeast, brought to the delicatessen combine straight from Pandora (in living biocontainers, covered with terracotta hoarfrost and bristling with homed respirator crooks, six kilos of the precious yeast in each sack), had rioted again. The taste-smell had crossed over into Sygma class, and the bitterness had risen to the last allowable degree. The experts were divided. The Master demanded that they cease making their alapaichiks, famous all over the planet, until they cleared things up, while Bruno, an insolent chatterbox, a boy, declared: “Why bother?” He had never dared raise his voice against the Master, and today suddenly he was giving speeches. The regular fans would simply not notice such a subtle change in flavor, and as for the gourmets, well, he bet his head that at least every fifth gourmet would be ecstatic over a taste change like that... Who needed his head? But they supported him! And now it wasn’t clear what would happen...

Asya flung open the window, sat on the windowsill, and looked down into the two kilometers of blue-green expanse.

“I’m afraid I’ll have to go to Pandora,” she said.

“For long?” Toivo asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe for long”

“Why it that?” Toivo asked carefully.

“You see... Master feels that we’ve checked everything possible here on Earth. That means that there’s something wrong on the plantations. Maybe there’s a new strain... or maybe something’s happening in transit ... We don’t know.”

You’ve gone to Pandora once already,” Toivo said, growing grin. “You went for a week and stayed three months.”

“What can I do?”

Toivo scratched his cheek and groaned.

“I don’t know what you can do, but I do know that three months without you is horrible.”

“And two years without me? When you were on that... whatsitsname...”

“Really! Bringing that up! I was young, I was a fool...I was a Progressor then! Iron man — muscles, mask, jaw! Listen, why doesn’t your Sonya go? She’s young and pretty; she can get married there. How about it?”

“Of course Sonya’s going with me. Any other ideas?”

“Yes. Let Master go. He started this whole thing, now let him go fix it.”

Asya merely looked at him.

“I take it back,” Toivo said quickly. “A mistake. An error.”

“He’s not even allowed to leave Sverdlovsk! He has taste buds! He hasn’t left his block in a quarter of a century!”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Toivo began berating himself. “Forever. Never again. I blurted it out. Made a gaffe. Let Bruno go.”

Asya spent several seconds burning him with an angry stare and then turned back to the window.

“Bruno won’t go,” she said angrily. “Bruno is going to work on the new bouquet. He wants to capture and standardize it... We’ll see about that...” She gave Toivo a sidelong glance and laughed. “Aha! Got you down! ‘Three months... without you.’ “

Toivo immediately got up, crossed the room, and sat on the floor at Asya’s feet, resting his head on her lap.

“You’re due for a vacation,” Asya said. “You could hunt there ...

It's Pandora, after all! You could go to the Dunes... Look at our plantations ... You can't imagine what the Pashkovsky plantations are like!"

Toivo was silent, and pressed his cheek harder against her knees. Then she stopped talking, and they were silent for a while, until Asya asked:

"Is something going with you?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I don't know. I can see."

Toivo sighed deeply, got up from the floor, and went to the windowsill.

"You are right," he said. "Something's happening."

"What?"

Toivo, squinting, examined the black streaks of clouds cutting across the coppery sunset. The bluish-black clusters of forest on the horizon. The thin black vertical of the thousand-story buildings, standing in blocks. The gigantic dome of the Forum on the left, shimmering copper, and the unrealistically smooth surface of the sea on the right. And the black, creeping swifts, darting from the hanging gardens a block higher and disappearing in the foliage of the hanging gardens a block lower.

"What's happening?" Asya asked.

"You are amazingly beautiful," Toivo said. "You have sable eyebrows. I don't know exactly what those words mean, but they were used for someone very beautiful. You. You're not even beautiful, you're gorgeous. Sweet to look at. And your concerns are sweet. And your world is sweet. Even yew Bruno is sweet, if you think about it... And the world is fine, if your must know... 'The world is fine, a pretty flower/Happiness for five hearts all in power/For nine kidneys/and four livers...' I don't know what that poem is. But it floated up in my memory, and I wanted to read it to you... Here's what I have to tell you. Remember this! It's quite possible that I'll fly out to join you on Pandora soon. Because his patience will burst any minute, and he will send me off on vacation. Or just send me old for good. That's what I read in his nut-brown eyes. As clear as on a monitor. And now let's have some tea."

Asya stared at him.

“It’s not working?” she asked.

Toivo avoided her eyes and shrugged his shoulders vaguely.

“Because from the very beginning, you were operating on the wrong theory,” Asya said hotly. “Because you set up the problem incorrectly. You can’t set up a problem so that no result satisfies you. Your hypothesis was flawed to begin with — remember, I told you that. If the Wanderers really were discovered, would that make you happy? And now you’re beginning to realize that they don’t exist, and you’re not happy either. You were wrong, you expressed the wrong hypothesis, feel as if you’re losing, when actually you haven’t lost anything.”

“I’ve never argued with you.” Toivo said meekly. “It’s all my fault, that’s my fate.”

“You see, now he’s disillusioned in that idea of yours, too. Of course I know he won’t fire you; you’re just blabbering. He like you and appreciates you, and everyone knows that... But really, you can’t waste all these years — and for what, really? After all, you two don’t have anything but the naked idea. No one’s arguing. The idea is rather curious, it can tickle the nerves of anyone at all; but it’s nothing more! Basically, it’s simply the inversion of a longtime custom of humanity... it’s just Progressorism in reverse, and nothing more... If we intervene in someone’s history, then someone could intervene in ours... Wait, listen to me! First of all, you two forget that not every inversion is expressed in reality. Grammar is one thing, and reality is another. So at first it seemed interesting, and now it seems simply... well, indecent, I guess... Do you know what one big shot said to me yesterday? He said, “We’re not COMCONites, you know’, those COMCONites are enviable. When they come up against a truly serious mystery, they quickly attribute it to the work of the Wanderers, and they’re done!”

“Who said that, I wonder’!” Toivo asked grimly.

“What difference does it make! Now our fermenters are rebelling. Why should we seek the causes? It’s perfectly clear its the work of the Wanderers! The bloody hand of a supercivilization! Don’t get mad, please. Don’t get mad! You don’t like jokes like that, but you almost never hear them. But I hear them all the time. You don’t know how much trouble I get just from the Sikorski Syndrome

alone... And it's not even a joke. It's a sentence, my dear people! It's a diagnosis!"

Toivo had gotten himself under control.

"Well, actually, the yeast is a thought," he said. "It's an unexplained event! Why didn't you report it?" he demanded severely. "Don't you know the regulations? I'm calling Master on the carpet!"

"It's all a joke to you," Asya said angrily. "Everybody's joking around here!"

"And that's fine!" Toivo said. "You should be happy. When it really starts, you won't feel like joking."

Asya struck her fist on her knee.

"Oh, God! What are you pretending for? You don't feel like joking, you don't have time for joking, and that's what irritates people about you COMCONites. You've built this grim, gloomy world around you, a world of threats, fear, and suspicion... Why? Where did you get it? Where did that cosmic misanthropy come from?"

Toivo said nothing.

"Maybe it's because all your unexplained events are tragedies? But all UEs are tragedies! Whether they're mysterious or ordinary, they're UEs! Right?"

"Wrong," Toivo said.

"What, are there happy Ues?"

"Sometimes."

"For instance?" Asya demanded, filling with venom.

"Let's have some tea instead," Toivo suggested.

"Oh no, you please give me an example of a happy, joyous, life-affirming UE."

"All right," Toivo said. "But then we'll have tea. Is it a deal?"

"The hell with you," Asya said.

They were silent. Below, through the thick foliage of the gardens, through the silvery blue twilight, multicolored lights went on. And the black columns of the thousand-story buildings were covered with the sparks of lights.

“Do you know the name Guzhon?” Toivo asked.

“Naturally.”

“And Soddi?”

“Of course!”

“What, in your opinion, makes these people special?”

“‘My opinion!’ It’s not my opinion. Everyone knows that Guzhon is a marvelous composer and Soddi a great confessor... And in your opinion?”

“In my opinion, they are special for a completely different reason,” Toivo said. “Albert Guzhon, until he was fifty, was an ordinary — but no more than that — agrophysicist without any talent for music. And Bartholomew Soddi studied shadow functions for forty years and was a pedantic, unsociable man. That’s what makes these people special, in my opinion.”

“What are you trying to say? You found intervention in that? People with hidden talents worked long and hard... and then quantity turned into quality...”

“There wasn’t any quantity, Asya, that’s the point: Only the quality changed suddenly. Radically. In an hour. Like an explosion.”

Asya was silent, chewing her lip, and then asked sarcastically, but uncertainly:

“So in your opinion, the Wanderers inspired them, right?”

“I didn’t say that. You asked me to cite examples of happy, life-affirming UEs. There you are. I can list another dozen names — not as famous, though.”

“All right. But why are you dealing with this? What business is it of yours, really?”

“We deal with any unexplained events.”

“That’s what I’m asking: what was unexplained or extraordinary about them?”

“Within the parameters of current concepts, they are inexplicable.”

“Well, lots of things are inexplicable in the world!” Asya cried. “Reeders are inexplicable; we’re just used to them.”

“We don’t consider things we’re used to as unexplained events,

Asya We deal with incidents, events. Something hasn't happened ever in a thousand years, and then it happens. Why did it happen? Unclear. How can it be explained! Specialists are confounded. Then we take note of it. See, Asya, you're not classifying UEs the right way. We don't divide them into happy and tragic ones, we divide them into explicable and inexplicable ones."

"Well, do you think that any inexplicable event carries a threat?"

"Yes. Including happy ones."

"What threat can there be in the unexplained transformation of a run-of-the-mill agrophysicist into a genius musician?"

"I didn't express myself accurately enough. The threat isn't in the event. The most mysterious events, as a rule, are the most harmless. Sometimes even funny. The cause of the event may be the threat. The mechanism that gave rise to the event You can put the question this way: why did someone need to turn an agrophysicist into a musician?"

"Maybe it's just a statistical fluctuation!"

"Maybe. That's the point, that we don't know... Incidentally, note where you have arrived. Tell me, please, why is your explanation any better than ours? Statistical fluctuation, by definition unpredictable and uncontrollable, or the Wanderers, who of course are no bowl of cherries, but who at least in principle can be caught red-handed. Of course, 'statistical fluctuation' sounds much more solid, scientific, objective — not those corny, cheap-romantic, banally legendary —"

"Wait, don't be spiteful, please," Asya said. "No one is denying your Wanderers. That's not what I'm talking about. You've confused me... you always get me off the track! Both me and your Maxim, and then you go around with your nose drooping, and want to be consoled... Yes, here's what I wanted to say. All right, let's assume that the Wanderers are interfering in our lives. That's nor the issue. Why is it bad? That's what I'm asking! Why are you turning them into bugbears? That's what I can't understand! And no one can understand... Why, when you were changing the course of history in other worlds that was all right, but when someone wants to change your history... Today, every child knows that super-reason is always good!"

“Super-reason is supergood,” Toivo said.

“Well, all the more, then!”

“No,” Toivo said. “Not all the more. We know what good is, though not very firmly. But as for supergood —”

Asya struck her knees with her fists again.

“I don’t understand! I can’t understand this! Where do you get all this presumption of a threat? Tell me. Explain it!”

“None of you understands the premise here,” Toivo said, angry now. “No one thinks that the Wanderers are planning to do evil to earthlings. That is really very unlikely. We’re afraid of something else altogether. We’re afraid that they’ll start doing good here, as they understand it!”

“Good is always good!” Asya said.

“You know perfectly well that that isn’t so. Or maybe you really don’t know? But I’ve explained it to you. I was a Progressor for only three years; I brought good, only good, nothing but good, and Lord,! how they hated me, those people! And they were right. Because the gods had come without asking permission. No one had called them in, and there they were, doing good. The good that is always good. And they were doing it secretly, because they know that mortals would not understand their aims, and if they did understand them, they wouldn’t accept them... That’s the moral and ethical structure of that damn situation! A feudal slave in Arkanara could not understand what communism is, while a smart bourgeois three hundred years later would understand and recoil from communism in horror... Those are the ABCs, which we however don’t know how to apply to ourselves. Why? Because we can’t imagine what the Wanderers could have in mind for us. The analogy doesn’t work! But I do know two things. They came without an invitation — that’s one. And they are certain that we will either not understand or not accept their goals — that’s two. And I don’t know about you, but I don’t want that I do not! That’s it!” he said with determination. “Enough. I’m a tired, unkind, careworn man who has shouldered a burden of indescribable responsibility. I have the Sikorski Syndrome, I’m a psychopath and a paranoid. I don’t love anyone; I’m a monster, a martyr, a monoman; I have to be cuddled and soothed... You have to tiptoe around me, kiss my shoulder, cajole me with jokes... and tea. My

God, aren't I going to get any tea around here today at all?"

Without a word, Asya jumped up and went off to make tea. Toivo lay down on the couch. Through the window, just on the threshold of hearing, came the buzz of some exotic musical instrument. An enormous butterfly flew in, circled the table, and settled on the visor screen, spreading its patterned black wings. Toivo, without getting up, started to reach for the service console, but didn't reach it and dropped his hand.

Asya came in with a tray, poured tea into the glasses, and sat down next to him.

"Look," Toivo whispered, indicating the butterfly with his eyes.

"How beautiful," Asya replied, in a whisper, too.

"Maybe it'll want to live with us here?"

"No, it won't."

"Why not? Remember, the Kazaryans had a dragonfly —"

"It didn't live with them. It just visited —"

"So this one can visit, too. We'll call her Martha."

"Why Martha?"

"What else?"

"Cynthia," said Asya.

"No," said Toivo firmly. "No Cynthias. She's Martha. Martha Posadnitsa. And the screen well call Posadnik."

I am not planning to maintain that this was the exact conversation they had late on the evening of May 8. But then, I do know for sure that they spoke on this topic often, argued, did not agree. And that neither of them could convince the other — I know that for sure, too.

Asya, naturally, was incapable of transmitting her universal optimism to her husband. Her optimism fed on the atmosphere itself, on the people she worked with, the essence of her work, tasty and kind. Toivo had been beyond the limits of this optimistic world, in the world of constant anxiety and tension, where optimism is passed from person to person only with great difficulty, under a confluence of proper circumstances, and not for long.

And Toivo was unable to convert his wife into an ally, to infect her with his sensation of pending doom. His arguments lacked concreteness. They were too speculative. They were a worldview, unconfirmed for Asya. He never did “horrify her,” infect her with his revulsion, indignation, and hostility...

That is why, when the storm broke, they were so unprepared, as if they had never had these arguments and lights, these ferocious attempts to convince each other.

On the morning of May 9, Toivo left for Kharkov to meet with the clairvoyant Hirota and to close the case on the visit of the Wizard for good.

[End of Document 9]

DOCUMENT 10:

T. Glumov: Theme 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

Addendum to Report 061/99

REPORT COMCON-2 No.017/99 Urals-North

Date: 9 May 99

FROM: T. Glumov, Inspector

THEME: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

CONTENTS: Addendum to report No.016/99

Susumu Hirota, a.k.a. Senrigan, received me in his office at 10:45. He is a short, well-built old man who looks much older than his age. He is quite taken with his “gift,” and uses any opportunity to demonstrate the gift: your wife is having problems at work... she will definitely fly to Pandora; don’t hope that it will be settled without her... this pen was a present from a friend, and you forgot to give it to your wife... And so on, in the same manner. Rather unpleasant, I might add. The Wizard’s Exit, according to him, looked like this: “He must have been afraid that I would learn something secret about him, and he turned to flee. It never occurred to him that I saw him as an empty whitish screen with a single contrast detail. After all, he is a creature from another world...”

T. Glumov

[End of Document 10.]

DOCUMENT 11:

T. Glumov: Memorandum on The Institute of Eccentrics
IMPORTANT! REPORT COMCON-2 No.018/99 Urals – North

Date: 9 May 99

FROM: T. Glumov, Inspector

THEME: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

CONTENTS: The Institute of Eccentrics is interested in the witnesses to the incident in Little Pesha.

During my conversation with the dispatcher on duty at the Institute of Eccentrics, on May 9 at 11:50 the following incident took place.

In talking to me, the duty dispatcher, Temirkanov, was simultaneously transferring data from the display terminal into the main computer very quickly and professionally. The data appeared on the control display and were in this format: surname, name, patronymic; (apparently) age: town (place of birth? place of residence; place of work?);profession; a certain six-digit index. I had not been paying attention to the display until it read:

KUBOTIEVA ALBINA MILANOVNA 96 BALLERINA
ARKHANGELSK 001507

Then two surnames that said nothing to me, and then:

KOSTENETSKY KIR 12 SCHOOLBOY PETROZAVODSK 001507

A reminder: these two are witnesses of the incident in Little Pesha, of my report No.015/99 of 7 May.

Apparently, I must have lost self-control for a few seconds, because Temirkanov asked what was so amazing. I got out of it by saying that I was surprised to see Albina Kubotieva, a ballerina my parents had always talked about, being wild balletomanes; it seemed strange to see her name here; was the Great Albina a metapsychological talent, too? Temirkanov laughed and said that it wasn't ruled out. According to him, all the branches of the Institute receive a steady list of people who theoretically could be of interest

to the metapsychotogists. The majority of the information comes from the terminals of clinics, hospitals, first-aid stations, and other medical establishments equipped with standard psychoanalyzers. In the Kharkov branch alone, hundreds of candidates are listed over a twenty-four-hour period, but they're almost all useless: "eccentrics" make up only one hundred-thousandth of a percent of all the candidates.

In the situation at hand, I felt it was proper to change the topic.

T. Glumov

[End of Document 11.]

DOCUMENT 12:

T. Glumov: A Working Phonogram

WORKING PHONOGRAM

Date: 10 May 99

INTERLOCUTORS: M. Kammerer, head of UE department; T. Glumov, inspector
THEME: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

CONTENTS: Institute of Eccentrics is a possible object for theme 009.

KAMMERER: Curious. You notice things, though, fellow. What an eye! But you have a theory ready, I’m sure. Go on.

GLUMOV: The final conclusion or the reasoning?

KAMMERER: The reasoning, please.

GLUMOV: It’s easiest to assume that the names of Albina and Kit were sent to Kharkov by some enthusiast of metapsychology. If he had been a witness to the event in Little Pesha, he could have been amazed by the anomalous reaction of those two, and reported his observations to competent authorities. I thought about it: at least three people could have that. Basil Neverov, the emergency-squad man. Oleg Pankratov, lecturer and former astroarchaeologist. And his wife Zosya Lyadova, artist. Of course, they weren’t witnesses in the narrow meaning of the word, but in the present situation it doesn’t matter... Without your permission, I did not risk talking to them, even though I consider it a possibility — to just clear it with them, did they give information to the Institute or not...

KAMMERER: There’s an even simpler way...

GLUMOV: Yes, the index. Ask the Institute. But that way is no good, and here’s why. If it was a volunteer enthusiast, it’ll be cleared up, and there won’t be anything to talk about. But I’d like to look at another version. To wit: there were no volunteer informants, but there was a special observer from the Institute of Eccentrics.

GLUMOV: Let’s assume that there was a special observer from the Institute of Eccentrics at Little Pesha. That would mean that some psychological experiment was going on there, with the aim of

sorting out, say, normal people from extraordinary people. For Instance, to then seek “eccentricity” among the extraordinary people. In that case, one of two things. Either the Institute of Eccentrics is an ordinary research center, where ordinary researchers work and set up ordinary experiments — however dubious morally, but in the final analysis intended for the benefit of science. But then it is not clear where they get the technology that far surpasses even the prospective capabilities of our embryomechanics and our bioconstruction.

(Pause)

GLUMOV: Or the experiment in Little Pesha was organized not by people, as we had assumed before. Then in what light do we see the Institute of Eccentrics?

(Pause)

GLUMOV: Then the Institute is no institute, the eccentrics are no eccentrics at all, and the personnel is not working on metapsychology at all.

KAMMERER: On what, then? What are they doing and who are they?

GLUMOV: You mean you don’t consider my arguments convincing again?

KAMMERER: On the contrary, my boy. On the contrary! They are too convincing, your arguments. But I would like you to formulate your idea directly, dryly, and unambiguously. As if in a report.

GLUMOV: All right. The so-called Institute of Eccentrics is actually a weapon of the Wanderers to sort out people according to a sign unknown to me for now. That’s it.

KAMMERER: And consequently, Danya Logovenko, the deputy director there, my longtime friend —

GLUMOV: (interrupting) No! That would be too fantastic. But perhaps your Danya Logovenko had been sorted out a long, long time ago. His longtime acquaintance with you doesn’t guarantee against it. He’s been sorted out and works with the Wanderers. Like all the personnel at the Institute, not to mention the “eccentrics.”...

GLUMOV: They’ been sorting for a least twenty years. When they had enough sorted ones, they organized the Institute, put in their

chambers of sliding frequencies, and under the excuse of searching for “eccentrics” check out ten thousand people a year... And we don’t even know how many other institutions like that there are under the most varied labels.

(Pause)

GLUMOV: And the Wizard ran off back to Saraksh not because he was insulted or had a stomach ache. He sensed the Wanderers! Like our whales and the lemmings... “When the blind see the seeing” - that’s about you and me. “Me sees the mountains and forests and doesn’t see a thing” — that’s also about us, Big Bug!

(Pause)

GLUMOV: So we can be the first people in history to catch the Wanderers red-handed.

KAMMERER: Yes. And it all began with two names which you accidentally noticed on the display. By the way, are you sure it was no accident?! (quickly) All right, all right, let’s skip it. What do you suggest?

GLUMOV: Me?

KAMMERER: Yes, you.

GLUMOV: We-ell, if you want my opinion... The first steps, I think, are obvious. First of all, we must determine if the Wanderers are there and figure out the sorted ones. Organize hidden mentoscopic observation and, if necessary, do enforced extra-deep mentoscopy on everyone there... I assume they’re prepared for that and will block out memory... That’s not so bad, that would be evidence... It would be worse if they know how to paint false memory...

KAMMERER: All right. Enough. You’re a fine boy. Congratulations, you did good work. And now, listen to my orders. Prepare for me lists on the following people. First: people with the inversion of the Penguin Syndrome, everyone registered with doctors to this day. Second: people who did not undergo fukamization —

GLUMOV: (interrupting) That’s more than a million people!

KAMMERER: No, I mean the people who refused the “maturity injection.” That’s twenty thousand people. You’ll have to work, but

we must be fully armed. Third: Collect all our data on people who vanished without a trace and put it all into one list.

GLUMOV: Including those who returned later?

KAMMERER: Especially those. Sandro is working on that; I'll put him on this with you. That's it.

GLUMOV: A list of inverters, a list of refusers, and a list of the reappeared. Fine. But still, Big Bug...

KAMMERER: Go on.

GLUMOV: Still allow me to talk with Neverov and that couple from Little Pesha.

KAMMERER: For the sake of your conscience?

GLUMOV: Yes. What if it's just an ordinary volunteer enthusiast...

KAMMERER: Permission granted. (after a brief pause) I wonder what you'll do if it does turn out to be an ordinary volunteer enthusiast...

[End of Document 12.]

I've just played that phonogram over again. My voice then was young, important, confident, the voice of a man who determined people's fates, for whom there were no mysteries in the past, the present, or the future, a man who knew what he was doing and who was right all around. Now I am simply astounded at what a marvelous actor and hypocrite I was then. Actually, I was on the last of my nerves and willpower then. I had a plan of action, I was waiting and couldn't wait for the President's sanctions, and I was trying to build up the nerve to go to Komov without the sanctions.

And for all that, I remember clearly the enormous pleasure I experienced listening to Toivo Glumov and watching him. For this really was his hour of triumph. He had looked for them for E ordinary volunteer enthusiast five years — those non-humans who had secretly invaded his Earth — looked for them, despite constant failure, almost alone, unsupported, tormented by his beloved wife's disbelief, looked for them and found them. He was right. He was more persistent than the rest — more patient, more serious — than all those wise guys, those lightweight philosophers, the intellectual ostriches.

Actually, I am ascribing that feeling of triumph to him. I don't

think that he felt anything at that moment except pathological impatience — to grab the enemy by the throat at last. For having proved incontrovertibly that his enemy was on Earth and acting, he still had no idea how he had proved it.

But I did. And still, looking at him that morning, I was so proud of him, so delighted in him, he could have been my son. And I would have wanted a son like him.

I loaded him up with work primarily because I wanted to keep him in his office at his desk. There was still no reply from the Institute, and the work on the lists had to be done anyway.

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DOCUMENT 13:

T. Glumov: Information on the Events at Little Pesha.

REPORT COMCON-2 No.019/99 Urals-North

Date: 10 May 99

FROM: T. Glumov, Inspector

THEME: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

CONTENTS: Information on the events in Little Pesha was sent to the institute of Eccentrics by O. O. Pankratov.

In accordance with your requests, I conducted conversations with B. Neverov and O. Pankratov and Z. Laydova with the object of determining if any of them sent information to the Institute of Eccentrics about the anomalous behavior of certain people during the incident at Little Pesha on the night of 6 May of this year.

1. The conversation with Basil Neverov, emergency-squad member, took place by videochannel yesterday around noon. The conversation held no operative interest. B. Neverov had certainly never heard of the Institute before I mentioned it.

2. Oleg Olegovich Pankratov and his wife, Zosya Lyadova, I met in the corridors of the regional conference of amateur astroarchaeologists in Syktyvkar. Over a casual cup of coffee, Oleg Olegovich actively and with pleasure picked up the conversation I began on the marvels of the Institute of Eccentrics and, on his own initiative, without any forcing from me, conveyed the following facts: — For many years now he has been a steady activist of the Institute and even has his own index as a separate and steady source of information; — It was thanks to efforts that such marvelous phenomena as Tira Glazuzskaya (“Black Eye”), Lebey Malang (psychoparamorph), and Konstantin Movzon (“Lord of the Flies V”) came to the attention of the metapsychologists; — He was very grateful to me for the information on the amazing Albina and the fantastic Kir, which I had given him so kindly that day in Little Pesha, and which he immediately sent on to the Institute; — He had been to the Institute three times — at the annual conferences of activists; he did not personally know Daniil Alexandrovich

Logovenko, but he had great respect for him as an outstanding scientist.

3. In connection with the above, I feel that my report No.018/99 has no interest for theme 009.

T. Glumov

[End of Document 13.]

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DOCUMENT 14:

Glumov Requests a Leave of Absence to visit Pandora. Permission Denied.

REPORT To Head of UE Dept — M. Kammerer From Inspector T. Glumov

Please give me a leave of absence for six months because I need to accompany my wife on a long business trip to Pandora.

10/5/99

T. Glumov

RESOLUTION: Permission denied. Continue your assignment.

10 May 99

M. Kammerer

[End of Document 14.]

DOCUMENT 15:

Unusual Events Department: 11 May.

UNUSUAL EVENTS DEPARTMENT. ROOM "D."

11 MAY 99

On the morning of May 11, a grim Toivo came to work and saw my resolution. He must have calmed down overnight. He did not protest or insist, but hunkered down in room D and started working on the list of inverts, soon coming up with seven, only two of whom were named, the rest given as "patient Z., servomechanic," "Theodore P., ethnolinguist," and so on.

Around noon, Sandro Mtbevari showed up in room D, haggard, yellow, and frazzled. He sat down at his desk and, without any preamble or the usual jokes (when he came back from long trips), told Toivo that on Big Bug's orders he was reporting to him, but would first like to finish his report on his trip. "What's the holdup?" Toivo asked warily, rather surprised by the man's appearance. "The holdup," Sandro answered irritably, "is that something happened to him and he wasn't sure whether it should be included in the report or not, and if so, then in what light."

And he began to tell him, choosing his words with difficulty, getting the details confused, and laughing convulsively at himself throughout.

This morning he got out of the zero-cabin at the resort town of Rosalinda (not far from Biarritz), covered some five kilometers down an empty, rocky path through vineyards, and appeared at his goal around ten o'clock: there was the Valley of Roses. The path led down to the Bon Vent, whose pointed roof stuck out through the thick foliage below. Sandro automatically noted the time — it was ten to ten, just as he had planned. Before starting the descent to the house, he sat down on a round black boulder and shook the pebbles from his sandals. It was already very hot, and the sun-warmed boulder burned through his shorts, and he was very thirsty.

Apparently, at just that moment he felt sick. There was ringing in

his ears, and the sunny day grew dark. He thought that he was going down the path, walking, without sensing his legs, past a cheery gazebo that he had not noticed from above, past a glider with an open top and a topsy-turvy engine (as if entire sections had been removed), past a huge shaggy dog that lay in the shade and indifferently watched him, its red tongue lolling. Then he went up the steps to the veranda, entwined in roses. He definitely heard the steps creaking, but he still did not feel his legs. In the depths of the veranda there stood a table covered with strange objects, and at the foot of the table leaning on widespread arms, was the man he needed.

The man raised his tiny eyes, hidden beneath gray eyebrows, and a look of regret crossed his face. Sandro introduced himself and, almost not hearing his own voice, told him his cover story. But before he got out a dozen sentences, the man wrinkled up his face and said, "I can't believe it, you're really here at the wrong time!" Sandro came to his senses, surfacing from semiconsciousness, covered in sweat and holding his right sandal in his hand. He was sitting on the boulder, the hot granite was burning through his shorts, and the time was still ten to ten. Well, maybe fifteen seconds had passed, no more.

He put on the sandal, wiped his sweaty bee, and then had another attack, apparently. He was going down the path again, not feeling his own legs; the world looked as if he was seeing it with a neutral filter on his eyes, and only one thought was going through his mind: "I can't believe it, how I'm really here at the wrong time!" And once again on his left was the cheery gazebo (a doll without arms and only one leg lay on the floor), and he passed the glider (a lively imp was drawn on the side), and there was a second glider, farther back, also with the hood up, and the dog had pulled in its tongue and was dozing, its heavy head on its paws. (What a strange dog; was it a dog at all?) The creaky steps. The coolness of the veranda. And once more the man looked at him from beneath his brows, wrinkled his face, and spoke in a fake threatening tone, the way you talk to a naughty child: "What did I tell you? Inconvenient! Shoo!" And Sandro woke up again. But now he wasn't on the boulder, but next to it on the dry prickly grass, and he was nauseated.

What's the matter with me today? he thought with fear and sadness, and tried to get himself in hand. The world was still

subdued and his ears still rang, but at the same time Sandro had himself in full control. It was almost exactly ten o'clock, and he was very thirsty; but he no longer felt weak, and he had to complete his mission. He got up and saw that the man had come out on the path and stopped, looking in Sandro's direction, and then the shaggy dog came out of the bushes and stood at the man's feet and also looked at Sandro, and Sandro realized that it wasn't a dog but a young Golovan. And Sandro raised his arm, not knowing why, either as a sign of greeting or to get their attention, but the man turned his back, and the world grew black before Sandro's eyes and went off obliquely down and to the left.

When he regained consciousness yet again, he was sitting on a bench in the midst of the reset Rosalinda, next to the zero-cabin he had arrived in. He was still nauseated and thirsty, but the world was clear and welcoming. It was 10:42. Insouciant, festive people passed by, then looked at him anxiously and slowed down, and a robot waiter rolled over and brought him a beaded glass of something...

Hearing him out, Toivo was silent for a while and then spoke, choosing his words carefully.

"That has to be included in the report, for sure."

"Let's assume so," Sandro said. "But in what accent?"

"Write it the way you told me."

"I told you it as if I got sick in the heat and the whole thing was a delirium."

"You're not sure it was a delirium?"

"How should I know? But I could have told it as if I had been hypnotized, as if it had been an induced hallucination..."

"Do you think the Golovan induced the hallucination?"

"I don't know. Maybe. But probably not. He was too far from me — about seventy meters, at least — and he was too young for those tricks. And then: what for?"

They were silent. Then Toivo asked: "What did Big Bug say?"

"Oh, he didn't even let me open my mouth, he didn't even look at me. 'I'm busy. You're working for Glumov now.'"

"Tell me," Toivo said, "are you sure that you didn't go down to

the house even once?”

“I’m not sure of anything. I am sure that there’s something very dirty going on with these Val Winkles. I’ve been working on them since the beginning of the year, and nothing’s clear. On the contrary, things get darker with every incident... Well, there hasn’t been anything like today before, that was extra special...”

Toivo spoke through gritted teeth. “But don’t you see what it smells of, if it really happened?” He had a sudden thought. “Wait! How about your registrator? What does your registrator say?”

Sandra replied with a look of total submission to fate: “Nothing’s on my registrator. It wasn’t turned on.”

“Really, now!”

“I know. Except I remember distinctly recharging it and turning it on before I left.”

[End of Document 15.]

DOCUMENT 16:

Theme 101 "Rip Van Winkle." Mtbevari, Inspector.

No.047/99 Urals-North

Date: 4 - 11 May 99

FROM: S. Mtbevari, Inspector

THEME: 101 "Rip Van Winkle"

CONTENTS: Result of the inspection on "Group of 80."

I received your orders on the inspection the morning of May 4. I started immediately.

4 May at 22:40.

Astangov, Yuri Nikolaevich. Not at registered address. No new address left in the BVI. Questioned relatives, friends, and business associates, to no avail. General response: can't tell you anything, haven't been in contact the last few years. After his return in 95 he became even more of a hermit than before his disappearance. Checked with the cosmodrome network, the circumterrestrial zero-Ts, the system of HD enterprises (heightened danger): nothing. Suggestion: Yuri Astangov, like last time, has "secluded himself in the debris of the Amazon Basin to polish his new philosophical system." (It would be interesting to talk to someone familiar with his previous philosophical system. Doctors deny it, but I think he's a psycho.)

6 May, at 23:30

Lehair, Fernand. He saw me at his registered address at 11:05. I gave him my cover story, after which we chatted until 12:50. Lehair told me that he feels wonderful, is not experiencing any symptoms of illness, no consequences of his amnesia during the years 89-91, and therefore sees no need to be mentoscoped. He can add nothing new to what he said in 91, because he still remembers nothing. Transmantle engineering has not interested him in a long time, and for the last few years he has been inventing and researching multimeasure games. He spoke in a kindly but vague manner. Then he grew animated: he decided to teach me the game "snip-snap-snurre." We parted on that (I later learned that F. Lehair really has

become a major specialist in multimeasure games; he's been dubbed "the joker for academicians.")

Tuul, Albert Oskarovich. Not at registered address. New address in the BVI: Venusborg (Venus). Not at that address either. The data on his Venerian registration: A. Tuul never showed up on Venus. In 97, he told his mother that he wanted to work with the Pathfinders in the Hius camp (on the planet Kala-i-Moog). Since then, she has been receiving cards from him rather regularly (the last this March). These are actually long letters with detailed and rather artistic descriptions of his searches for traces of the civilization of "werewolves." Data from Hius camp: A. Tuul was never there, but he regularly calls on the zero-communicator the grounddigger of the group, E. Kapustin, who is absolutely certain that his good pal A. Tuul is living, on Earth at his registered address. Kapustin last spoke with Tuul on January 1. Check on the cosmodrome network reveals that since 96 (the year he reappeared) he's gone into Deep Space several times, and returned from Resort the last time in October 98. Check on circumterrestrial zero-T: has visited the moon several times, also the "Greenhouses," and BOP. Check on systems of HD enterprises: since December 96 through October 97 worked at the abyssal laboratory Tuskarora-16 as a gastronome. Supposition: A. Tuul is a very lighthearted person, with a low level of civic responsibility; the incident in 89 taught him nothing, and he still does not wish to admit the importance of such a trifle as precise personal address.

8 May 99, at 22:10.

Bagration, Mavrikii Amazaspovich. Not at registered address. No new address in the BVI. Due to his advanced age, he has no near living relatives with whom he is in steady contact. His business ties broke off a quarter-century ago. His two old friends, known from the investigation of this disappearance in 81, are not at their registered addresses, and I have not yet been able to determine their whereabouts. Checks on the cosmodrome network, the circumterrestrial zero-T, and the HD enterprises systems: nothing. Data from the gerontological center: they haven't been able to catch the object of this investigation for years... Supposition: an unregistered fatal accident. I would consider it proper to find his friends and let them know.

Jan, Martin. Not at registered address. New address in the BVI:

Matrix base (Second, EN 7113). Sent to Matrix in January 93 by the Institute of Bioconfigurations (London) as an interpreter. At the present (since 98), has been on a long vacation; location unknown. Checks on cosmodrome network, circumterrestrial zero-T, and HD enterprises systems: nothing since December 98. A curiosity: S. Van, a neighbor of M. Jan's at the registered address, maintains that he saw Jan in March of this year; Jan appeared before his very eyes in his yard in a glider and without going into the house began taking the glider apart; he replied casually to Jan's greeting and avoided conversation; Van went off and when he returned several hours later, both Jan and the glider were gone, never to reappear. This story seems interesting, since the mystery of Jan's first disappearance was in the fact that the registrator of the cosmodrome network did not have either his departure or his arrival. Question: are there organisms whose genetic code is not perceived or registered by existing registration?

DOCUMENT 17:

The Head of the UE Department from the President

TO THE HEAD OF THE UE DEPARTMENT FROM THE
PRESIDENT

Dear Big Bug!

Can't do anything about it. They're putting me in the hospital for surgery. However, every cloud has a silver lining. G. Komov is adding my responsibilities to his own (starting tomorrow, I think). I passed your materials along to him. I won't hide the fact that he was skeptical. But he knows me, and he knows you. Now he is prepared, so that you have a chance to convince him, especially if you have been able to obtain the materials you were hoping to get. And then you will be dealing not only with the president of Secor CC-2, but also with an influential member of the World Council. I wish you success, and you wish me success, too.

Athos. 11/05/99

[End of Document 17.]

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DOCUMENT 18:

Charles Laboraut to Mac!

Mac!

1. Glumov, Toivo Alexandrovich was taken into control today.
(Registered 8/05).

2. Also taken under control today:

— Kaskazi, Artek 18 student Tehran 7/05 — Mauki, Charles 63
mari-technician Odessa 8/05

Laborant

11 May 99

[End of Document 18.]

This must be strange, but I can hardly remember my feelings when I got that amazing missive from Laborant. I do remember one sensation — like an unexpected and vile slap in the face, for no reason, for nothing, out of the blue, when you don't expect it, when you're expecting something else. A childish hurt, tearful - that's all I remember, and that's all that's left from what must have been an hour that I spent with my mouth wide open and staring straight ahead.

I must have had thoughts of betrayal and treason. I must have been enraged, embittered, and disappointed because I had worked out a definite plan of action, with a part for everyone, and now there was a hole in the plan and no way of plugging it up. And bitterness, of course, there was desperate bitterness, of loss, the loss of a friend, an ally, a son.

And most probably there was a temporary blackout, chaos not of feelings but of the debris of feelings.

Then gradually I regained control and went back to reasoning — coldly and methodically, the way I had to reason in my position.

The wind of the gods raises storms but it also fills sails.

Reasoning coldly and methodically, I found a new place for the new Toivo Glumov in my plan on that muggy morning. And that new place seemed to me then to be incomparably more important

than the old one. My plan acquired a long-range prospect, and now we could attack instead of defend ourselves.

On that same day, I reached Komov, and he gave me an appointment for the next day, the twelfth of May.

On May 12, early in the morning he saw me in the President's office. I gave him all the materials I had gathered by then. The conversation lasted five hours. My plan was approved with insignificant changes. (I cannot maintain that I managed to fully overcome Komov's skepticism, but I did manage to interest him without any doubt.)

On May 12, when I came back to my office, I sat for a few minutes with the tips of my index fingers at my temples, in the manner of Honti scouts, thinking lofty thoughts, and then called in Grisha Serosovin and gave him an assignment. At 18:05, he told me that the assignment was completed. Now all we had to do was wait.

On the morning of the thirteenth, Danya Logovenko called.

DOCUMENT 19:

Memorandum from 17; Interlocutors 13 May 99.

WORKING PHONOGRAM

Date: 13 May 99

INTERLOCUTORS: M. Kammerer, head of UE Department; D. Logovenko, deputy director of the Kharkov Branch, IMI

THEME X X X

CONTENTS X X X

LOGOVENKO: Hello, Maxim, it's me.

KAMMERER: Greetings. What do you have to say?

LOGOVENKO: I say that it was cleverly done.

KAMMERER: I'm glad you like it.

LOGOVENKO: I can't say that I like, it much, but I have to credit an old friend. (pause) I understood it all to mean that you want to meet with me and speak openly.

KAMMERER: Yes. But not I. And maybe not with you.

LOGOVENKO: You'll have to talk to me. But if not you, who, then?

KAMMERER: Komov.

LOGOVENKO: Aha! So, you've made the decision...

KAMMERER: Komov is my direct boss now.

LOGOVENKO: Ah, so that's it, . All right. When and where?

KAMMERER: Komov wants Gorbovsky to be part of the conversation.

LOGOVENKO: Leonid Andreyevich? But he's on his deathbed...

KAMMERER: Precisely. Let him hear it all. From you.

LOGOVENKO: (after a pause) Yes. I see the time has come to talk.

KAMMERER: Tomorrow at 15:00 at Gorbovsky's. Do you know his house? Near Kraslava, on the Daugava River.

LOGOVENKO: I know it. Until tomorrow. You have everything?

KAMMERER: Everything. Till tomorrow.

(The conversation lasted from 9:02 until 9:04.)

[End of Document 19.]

It's amazing that for all its pushy energetic scrupulousness, the Luden group never bothered me about Daniil Alexandrovich Logovenko. Yet Danya and I go back a long way, to the blessed Sixties, when I, a young, devilishly energetic COMCONite, was taking a special course in psychology at Kiev U.; where Danya, then a young and devilishly energetic metapsychologist, was my practicum teacher, and in the evenings we dated charming and devilishly spoiled Kiev girls. He obviously thought more of me than the other students; we became friends and saw each other regularly for years. Then our studies separated us, we saw each other less frequently, and in the Eighties stopped seeing each other completely (until the tea at my house just before these events). He was very unhappily married, and now I know why. He was unhappy in general, which I can't say about myself.

In general, everyone who seriously studies the era of the Big Revelation tends to believe that he knows perfectly well who Daniil Logovenko was. What a delusion! What does someone who has read even the most complete collection of Newton's works know about Newton? Yes, Logovenko had played an extremely important role in the Big Revelation. The Logovenko Impulse, Logovenko's T-program, the Logovenko Declaration, the Logovenko Committee...

But what was the fate of Logovenko's wife; do you know that?

And how did he end up in the courses of higher and anomalous etology in the city of Split?

And why in the year 66 did he zero in on M. Kammerer, energetic and promising COMCONite, of all his students?

And what did D. Logovenko think of the Big Revelation — not lecture, or declare, or proselytize, but think and feel in the depths of his inhuman soul?

There are many such questions. I can answer some of them accurately. I can make suppositions about some. And for the rest, there are no answers and never will be.

DOCUMENT 20:

T. Glumov: Theme 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

REPORT COMCON-2 No.020/99 Urals-North

Date: 13 May 99

FROM: T. Glumov, Inspector

THEME: 009 “A Visit from an Old Lady”

CONTENTS: Comparison of the lists of people with the inversion of the Penguin Syndrome with the Theme List.

On your orders I made up a list from all available sources of cases of the inversion of the Penguin Syndrome. I found only twelve cases, and I managed to identify ten. Comparison of the list of identified inverts with the T-List gave cross-reference on the following:

1. Krivoklykov, Ivan Georgievich, 65 psychiatrist, Lemba base (EN 2105).
2. Pakkala, Alf-Christian, 31 builder operator, Anchorage, Alaska.
3. Io, Nika, 48 fabric designer, Irawadi factory, Phyapown.
4. Tuul, Albert Oskarovich, 59 gastronome, whereabouts unknown. (See report No.047/99, S. Mtbevari.)

The percentage of cross-references of the list seems incredibly high to me. The fact that Tuul, A.O., belongs on three lists is even more astonishing.

I feel it necessary to call your attention to the full list of people with the Penguin Syndrome inversion. The list is attached.

T. Glumov

[End of Document 20.]

DOCUMENT 21:

Kraslava, Latvia

“LEONID’S HOUSE” (KRASLAVA, LATVIA).

14 MAY 99. 15:00

The Daugava River near Kraslava was narrow, fast, and clean. The sandy strip of beach showed yellow near the water and led to a steep sandy slope that reached the fir forest. On the gray-and-white-checked landing square overhanging the water, multicolored flyers parked carelessly baked in the sun. All three of them were old-fashioned machines now used only by old men born in the last century.

Toivo reached for the glider’s door, but I said. “Don’t. Wait”

I was looking up to where amid the firs stood the cream-colored little house from which the stairs, made to look like silvery weathered wood, zigzagged along the cliff. Someone dressed in white was slowly descending the stairs — a stout, almost cubic man, clearly very old, clutching the railing with his right hand, going step by step, one foot at a time, a sunspot flickering on his large smooth pate. I recognized him. It was August-Johann Bader, Paratrooper and Pathfinder. A ruin of a heroic era.

“Let’s wait for him to go down,” I said. “I don’t want to meet him.”

I turned away and looked in the other direction, across the river, at the other shore, and Toivo also turned away tactfully. So we sat until we could hear the heavy creak of the steps and the heavy, whistling wheeze and other inappropriate sounds; something like sobbing, and the old man passed the glider, scuffing his feet along the plastic, and appeared in my field of vision. Reluctantly, I looked at his face.

Up close, his face seemed totally unfamiliar to me. It was deformed by grief. The soft cheeks sagged and shook, the mouth hung open, and tears flowed from the puffy eyes.

Hunched over, Bader approached the ancient yellow-green flyer — the most ancient of the three, with idiotic protuberances on the

hood, with ugly visor slits for the old-fashioned autopilot, with dented sides and tarnished chrome handles — he approached, threw open the door, and with a grunt or a sob climbed in.

Nothing happened for a long time. The flyer stood with the open door, and the old man was either preparing himself for a flight or weeping in there, his bald head on the chipped oval steering wheel. Then, at last, a brown hand came out of a white cuff and slammed the door. The ancient machine lifted off with unexpected lightness and in total silence and went off over the river between the cliffs.

“That was Bader,” I said. “Saying good-bye... Let’s go.”

We got out of the glider and started up the stairs.

I said without turning around, “No emotions. You’re on your way to a report. This will be a very important business conversation. Don’t. go soft.”

“A business conversation is wonderful,” Toivo said to my back. “But I have this feeling that now is not the time for business talks.”

“You’re wrong This is the very time. As for Bader... don’t think about that now. Think about the work.”

“All right,” Toivo said obediently.

Gorbovsky’s place; “Leonid’s House,” was a standardized house of the turn-of-the-century architecture — the favorite of space travelers, deepwater men; and transmantle explorers who had grown nostalgic for the bucolic — without a workroom, cattle yard, or kitchen... but with an energy supply to serve the personal zero-installation to which Gorbovsky., as a member of the World Council, was entitled. And all around were the firs and heather, the air was redolent of warm evergreens, and bees buzzed somnolently in the still air.

We reached the veranda and stepped into the house through the open doors. In the living room, where the windows were tightly shut and the only light came from a floor lamp near the couch, sat a man with his legs crossed, examining in the lamplight either a map or a mentoscheme. It was Komov.

“Hello,” I said, and Toivo bowed silently.

“Hello, hello,” Komov said impatiently. “Come in, sit down. He’s sleeping. Fell asleep. That Triple-damned Bader wore him out... Are

you Glumov?"

"Yes," Toivo said.

Komov looked at him closely, curiously. I gave a little cough, and Komov stopped.

"Your mother wouldn't happen to be Maya Toivovna Glumova?" he asked.

"Yes," Toivo said.

"I had the honor of working with her," Komov said.

"Yes?" Toivo said.

"Yes. Didn't she tell you? Operation Ark —"

"Yes, I know the story," Toivo said.

"What is Maya Toivovna doing now?"

"Xenotechnology."

"Where? With whom?"

"At the Sorbonne. I think with Saligny."

Komov nodded. He kept looking at Toivo. His eyes were glistening. You have to realize that the sight of Maya Glumov's grown son stirred tender memories in him. I coughed again, and Komov turned to me.

"Incidentally, if you need refreshing... The drinks are here in the bar. We'll have to wait. I don't want to wake him. He's smiling in his sleep. Seeing something good... Damn that Bader with his sniveling!"

"What do the doctors say?" I asked.

"The same thing. No desire to live. There's no medicine for that... Actually, there is, but he doesn't want to take it. He's lost interest in living — that's the problem. We can't understand that... After all, he's over one hundred fifty... Tell me, please, Glumov, what does your father do?"

"I almost never see him," Toivo said. "I think he's a hybridizer now. I think on Yayla."

"And you —" Komov began, but stopped because from back in the house came a weak, hoarse voice.

"Gennady! Who's there? Bring them in..."

“Let’s go,” Komov said, leaping up.

The windows in the bedroom were wide open. Gorbovsky was lying on the couch covered with a plaid coverlet up to his armpits, and he seemed unbelievably long, thin, and pathetic. His cheeks were hollow, his famous ski nose was bony, the sunken eyes were sad and dull. They did not seem to want to see anymore, but they had to see, and see they did.

“Ah, Maxie...” Gorbovsky said. “You’re still the same. Handsome. Glad to see you, I am...”

That wasn’t true. He wasn’t glad to see Maxie. He wasn’t glad about anything. Probably he thought he was giving me a welcoming smile, but actually his face was in a grimace of bored courtesy. I could feel admire, condescending patience in it. As if Leonid Andreyevich were thinking: so someone else is here now... well, it can’t be for long ... they’ll leave, like all the rest, and give me some peace.

“And who’s this?” Gorbovsky inquired, overcoming his apathy with visible effort.

“This is Toivo Glumov,” Komov said. “COMCONite, an inspector. I told you —”

“Yes, yes, yes..” Gorbovsky said wanly.. “I remember. You did. ‘A Visit from an Old Lady.’... Sit down, Toivo, sit, my lad. I’m listening to you.”

Toivo sat down and looked questioningly at me.

“Tell him your point of view,” I said. “And give your reasons.”

Toivo began:

“I am formulating a certain theory now. The formulation does not belong to me. Dr. Bromberg formulated it five years ago. Here it is, the theory. In the early Eighties, a certain supercivilization, which we call the Wanderers, to be brief, began actively progressorizing on our planet. One of the goals of that activity is selection. By various methods the Wanderers are selecting from the mass of humanity those individuals who, by certain Wanderer criteria, are suitable for... well, suitable for contact. Or for further improvement of the species. Or even for transformation into Wanderers. The Wanderers must certainly. have other goals as well, about which we cannot even guess, but it is perfectly clear to me that they are

making selections, pulling us, and I will try to prove that now.”

Toivo stopped. Komov was staring at him. Gorbovsky seemed to be asleep, but his fingers; clasped upon his chest, kept moving, tracing complex patterns in the air. Then he suddenly asked, without opening his eyes: “Gennady, bring my guests something to drink... They must be hot.”

I jumped up, but Komov stopped me.

“I’ll get it,” he mumbled, and left.

“Go on, my boy,” Gorbovsky said.

Toivo went on. He told about the Penguin Syndrome: with the aid of a “net” the Wanderers set up on sector 41/02; they could reject people suffering from hidden cosmophobia and select latent cosmophiles. He told about the incident in Little Pesha: there with the aid of clearly non-terrestrial biotechnology the Wanderers set up an experiment in locating xenophobes and selecting xenophiles. He told of the battle for the Amendment. Apparently, fukamization either interfered in the Wanderers’ selection process or threatened to extinguish in future generation qualities needed by the Wanderers, and they somehow, organized and waged a successful campaign to do away with the mandatory aspect of the procedure. Over the years, the number of the selected kept growing. It could not go unnoticed; we could not help noticing the “selected” and we did notice them. The disappearances of the Eighties... the sudden transformation of ordinary people into geniuses... the people Sandro Mtbevari just found with fantastic abilities... and finally, the so-called Institute of Eccentrics in Kharkov, the undoubted center of the Wanderer activity in discovering candidates for selection.

“They’re not even hiding too hard,” Toivo said. “Apparently, they feel so secure now that they’re not afraid of exposure. Perhaps they feel that we cannot change anything now. I don’t know... Actually, I’m finished. I want to add that only a minuscule portion of the spectrum of their activity fell within our field of vision. We must bear that in mind. And I feel bound in conclusion to mention kindly Dr. Bromberg, who five years ago, with no positive information to go on, calculated the whole phenomenon that we have now discovered: the appearance of mass phobias and the sudden appearance of talent in people, and even irregularities in the behavior of animator instance, the whales.”

Toivo turned to me.

"I'm done," he said.

I nodded. Everyone was silent.

"Wanderers, Wanderers." Gorbovsky almost sang the words: He was lying down with the coverlet pulled up to his nose. "What else? As long as I can remember, from my childhood, there has been talk about those Wanderers... You really dislike them for something, Toivo, my boy. Why?"

"I don't like Progressors," Toivo replied coolly, and added, "Leonid Andreyevich, I used to be a Progressor myself..."

"No one likes Progressors," Gorbovsky muttered, "even Progressors themselves." He sighed deeply and shut his eyes again. "To tell the truth, I don't see a problem here. It's all just clever interpretations, nothing more. If you were to pass along your materials to, say, pedagogues, they would have their own, no less clever, interpretations. Deepwater men, they have their own myths, their own Wanderers... Don't be insulted, Toivo, but the very mention of Bromberg made me wary."

"Incidentally, all of Bromberg's works on the Monocosm have disappeared," Komov said softly.

"He never had any works, of course!" Gorbovsky giggled weakly. "You didn't know Bromberg. He was an acidulous old man with a fantastic imagination. Maxie sent him his anxious query. Bromberg, who had never thought about the issue in his life, sat down in a comfortable chair, stared at his index finger, and sucked the hypothesis of the Monocosm out of it. That took an evening. And the next day he forgot all about it... He not only had a wild imagination, he was a specialist in forbidden arts, and he had in his head an unimaginable number of unimaginable analogies."

No sooner had Gorbovsky stopped talking than Komov said:

"Did I understand you correctly, Glumov? You maintain that Wanderers are on Earth right now? As creatures, I mean. As individuals..."

"No," Toivo said. "I am not maintaining that."

"Did I understand you correctly, Glumov, that you maintain that conscious allies of the Wanderers are living and acting on Earth?"

The 'selected,' as you call them!"

"Yes."

"Can you name names?"

"Yes. With some degree of certainty."

"Go on."

"Albert Oskarovich Tuul. That's almost certain. Cyprian Okigbo. Martin Jan. Emile Far-Ale. Almost certain. I can name a dozen, but I'm less certain about them."

"Have you talked to any of them?"

"I think I have. At the Institute of Eccentrics. I think there are many of them there. But who exactly, I can't say with certainty yet."

"You mean to say that you do not know the distinguishing marks"

"Of course not. They don't look any different from you or me. But you can figure them out. At least, with a degree of certainty. But at the institute of Eccentrics, I'm sure that they have a special apparatus that identifies their own without error."

Komov gave me a quick glance. Toivo noticed it and said in a challenging tone:

"Yes! I feel that this is no time to stand on ceremony! We'll have to drop some of the achievements of higher humanism! We're dealing with Progressors, and we'll have to behave like Progressors!"

"To wit?" Komov asked, leaning forward.

"The entire arsenal of our operative methodics. From sending in a mole agent to forced mentoscopy, from..."

Gorbovsky groaned, and we turned to him in fear, Komov even jumped to his feet. However, nothing terrible had happened to Leonid Andreyevich. He was still lying in his former pose, but now the grimace of false courtesy was replaced by a grimace of scornful irritation.

"What are you planning around me?" he said in a whine. "You're grown-ups, after all, not schoolboys, not college men. Aren't you ashamed of yourselves. Really! That's why I don't like these conversations about Wanderers, and never have! They always end

up with this terrified babble from detective novels! When will you realize that these things are mutually exclusive... Either the Wanderers are a supercivilization, and then they don't give a fig for us, they are creatures with a different history, different interests, they don't bother with Progressorism, and in general in the whole universe only humanity has Progressors, because our history is like that, because we weep over our past... We can't change it and we strive to at least help .others, since we managed to help ourselves in time... That's where our Progressorism comes from! And the Wanderers, even if their past did resemble ours, are so far from it now that they don't even remember it, just as we don't remember the sufferings of the first hominid struggling to turn a stone into an ax..." He was silent. "It is just as ridiculous for a supercivilization to have Progressors as it would be for us to open courses to prepare village deacons..."

He stopped talking for a long time, his gaze moving from one face to another. I glanced over at Toivo. Toivo was looking away and shrugged his shoulders several times, as if to show that he had counterarguments but did not feel it proper to use them here. Komov, knitting his thick black brows, was looking off to one side.

"Hmm, hmm, hmm." Gorbovsky chuckled. "I haven't convinced you. All right, then I'll try insults. If even a green boy like our Toivo managed... uh... to ferret out those Progressors, then what the hell kind of Wanderers are they? Just think about it! Don't you think a supercivilization could do their work so that you couldn't notice? And if you noticed, then what the hell kind of a supercivilization is it? The whales went crazy, so it has to be the Wanderers' fault!... Begone, let me die in peace!"

We all got up.

Komov reminded me in a low voice: "Wait in the living room."

I nodded.

Toivo bowed to Gorbovsky in confusion. The old man paid no attention. He was staring angrily at the ceiling, his gray lips moving.

Toivo and I went out. I shut the door behind me and heard the soft slurp, the acoustic isolator going into action.

In the living room, Toivo sat on the couch under the lamp, placed

his hands on his knees, and did not move. He did not look at me. He had no time for me.

This morning, I had told him: “You’ll go with me. You’ll speak before Komov and Gorbovsky.”

“Why?” he asked, stunned.

“What’s the matter, do you imagine we can do it without the World Council?”

“But why me?”

“Because I’ve already talked to them. It’s your turn.”

“All right,” he said, setting his lips in a tight line.

He was a fighter, Toivo Glumov. He never retreated. You could only push him back.

And he had been pushed back. I watched him from the corner.

For some time he sat motionless. Then he flipped through the mentoschemas, marked in different colors by doctors, lying on the low table. Then he got up and paced the dark mom ham corner to comer, hands behind his back.

Impenetrable silence reigned in the house. The voices from in the bedroom could not be heard, nor the sounds of the forest because the windows were shut. He could not hear his own footsteps.

His eyes grew accustomed to the twilight. Leonid Andreyevich’s living room had Spartan furnishings: the floor lamp (the shade was clearly homemade), the large couch, and the low table. In the far corner, several seats of non-terrestrial backsides production and meant for non-terrestrial backsides. In the other corner, either an exotic plant or an ancient hatrack. That was all the furniture. But the bar was open, and I could see that there were bottles there for every taste. And there were paintings over the bar in transparent casings, the biggest the size of an album.

Toivo went over to examine them. They were children’s drawings. Watercolors. Gauche. Pen and ink. Little houses and big girls, pine trees reaching to their knees. Dogs (or Golovans?). An elephant. A Takhorg... Some space thing — either a fantastic starship or a hangar... Toivo sighed and went back to the couch. I watched him closely.

There were tears in his eyes. He wasn’t thinking about the lost

battle anymore. Gorbovsky was dying — an era was dying, a living legend was dying. Starpilot. Paratrooper. Discoverer of civilizations. Creator of Big COMCON. Member of the World Council. Grandpa Gorbovsky... Most of all: Grandpa Gorbovsky. Exactly. He was out of a fairy tale: always kind and therefore always right. That was his era, when kindness always won. “Of all possible choices, always pick the kindest” Not the most promising, not the most rational, not the most Progressorist, and certainly not the most effective — the kindest! He never said those words, and he always enjoyed taking a dig at those biographers of his who credited him with those words. He certainly never thought in those words; yet the essence of his life was in those words. And of course, those words are not a recipe; not everyone is given to be kind; it is a talent just like an ear for music or clairvoyance, only rarer. And he wanted to cry, because the kindest man in the world was dying. And on the scone will be carved: “He was the kindest...”

I think Toivo was thinking just that. Everything I was planing depended on Toivo’s thinking just that.

Forty-three minutes passed.

The door flew open. It was like in a fairy tale. Or the movies. Gorbovsky, unimaginably tall in his striped pajamas, skinny, merry, stepped unsteadily into the living room, dragging the plain behind him, for the fringe had caught on one of his buttons.

“Aha, you’re still here!” he said in a joyous satisfaction to Toivo, who sat stunned on the couch. “Everything is ahead of us, my boy! Everything is ahead! You’re right!”

And having spoken those mysterious words, he hurried, reeling slightly, to the nearest window and opened the blind. It grew blindingly bright, and we squinted, and Gorbovsky turned and stared at Toivo, frozen by the lamp at attention. I looked over at Komov. Komov was openly radiant, his sugar-white teeth gleaming, smug as a cat who swallowed a goldfish. He looked like a sociable fellow who had just drank a toast to a good thing. Which was in fact the fact.

“Not bad, not bad!” Gorbovsky said. “Even excellent!”

Cocking his head, he moved closer to Toivo, looking him over from head to toe, moved right up to him, put his hand an his shoulder, and clenched his bony fingers.

“Well, I think you’ll forgive my harshness, my lad,” he said. “But I was also right... And the harshness was from irritability. I’ll tell you something, dying is a really rotten business. Don’t pay any attention.”

Toivo was silent. Of course, he didn’t understand a thing. Komov had thought it all up and arranged it. Gorbovsky knew only as much as Komov felt he should be told. I could imagine the conversation they had in the bedroom. But Toivo Glumov understood nothing.

I took him by the elbow and told Gorbovsky, “Leonid Andreyevich, we’re leaving.”

Gorbovsky nodded.

“Go, of course. Thanks. You were a big help. We’ll be seeing each other, and more than once.”

When we got out on the porch, Toivo said, “Perhaps you will explain the meaning of this?”

“You see, he’s changed his mind about dying,” I said.

“Why?”

“That’s a stupid question, Toivo. Forgive me, please...”

Toivo paused and then said, “I am a fool. That is, I never felt like such a fool in my life... Thanks for your concern, Big Bug.”

I grinned. We went down the stairs to the landing square in silence. Some man was going up the stairs slowly.

“All right,” Toivo said. “But should I continue work on the theme?”

“Of course.”

“But they laughed at me!”

“On the contrary. You were a hit”

Toivo muttered something to himself. At the first landing, we found ourselves with the man who had been going up the stairs. It was deputy director of the Kharkov branch of IMI, Daniil Alexandrovich Logovenko, rosy and very worried.

“Greetings,” he said. “I’m not too late?”

“Not too,” I replied. “He’s waiting for you.”

And here D. A. Logovenko gave Toivo Glumov a conspiratorial wink and then hurried up the stairs, now in a rush. Toivo, squinting meanly, watched him go.

[End of Document 21.]

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DOCUMENT 22:

A Confidential Memorandum

CONFIDENTIAL: FOR MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDIUM OF THE WORLD COUNCIL! No. 115

CONTENTS: Transcript of the conversation which took place at Leonid's house (Kraslava, Latvia) 14 May 99.

PARTICIPANTS: L. A. Gorbovsky, member of the World Council; G. Yu. Komov, member of the World Council, Acting President of Urals-North Section of COMCON-2; D. A. Logovenko, Deputy Director, Kharkov Branch IML.

KOMOV: You mean to say that you do not differ in any way from an ordinary man?

LOGOVENKO: The difference is enormous, but... Now, when I am sitting here talking to you, I differ from you only in the awareness that I am not like you. That is one of my levels... rather wearying, incidentally. It is hard to do, but I'm used to it, but the majority of us have grown accustomed to that level forever... But on this level, my differences can be discovered only with the aid of special apparatus.

KOMOV: You want to say that on other levels...

LOGOVENKO: Yes. On other levels, everything is different. Different consciousness, different physiology... different image, even...

KOMOV: You mean, on other levels you are no longer human?

LOGOVENKO: We aren't human. Don't let it confuse you that we are born human from humans...

GORBOVSKY: Forgive me, Daniil Alexandrovich. Could

LOGOVENKO: ... interfere. And not only because of that. We assumed that the secret should be kept first of all in your own interests, in the interests of humanity. I would like you to be fully clear on that issue. We are not people. We are Ludens. Do not fall into error. We are not the result of biological evolution. We

appeared because humanity has reached a certain level of sociotechnological organization. We could have discovered the third-impulse system in the human organism even a hundred years ago, but it only became possible to initiate it at the beginning of this century, while keeping a Luden on the spiral of psychophysiological development, to lead him from level to level to the very end... that is, in your concepts, to bring up a Luden, only became possible quite recently—

GORBOVSKY: Just a minute! Does that mean that the third impulse exists in every human organism?

LOGOVENKO: Unfortunately not, Leonid Andreyevich. That's the tragedy. The third impulse is found with a probability of no more than one one-hundred-thousandth. We still don't know where it came from or why. Most likely, it is the result of some ancient mutation.

KOMOV: One one-hundred-thousandth... that's not so little when translated to our billions. So, it means a schism?

LOGOVENKO: Yes. And that's why it was secret. Don't get me wrong. Ninety percent of Ludens are totally uninterested in the fate of humanity or in humanity. But there is a group of those like me. We do not want to forget that we are flesh of our flesh and that we have one homeland, and for many years we have been working on how to soften the consequences of the inevitable schism... For it looks as if humanity is being divided into a higher and a lower race. What could be more revolting? Of course, the analogy is superficial and at its root incorrect, but you can't avoid the feeling of humiliation at the thought that one of you has gone far beyond the limits that are impassable for a hundred thousand. And that one can never lose the guilt over it. And incidentally, the worst part is that this schism goes through families, through friendships...

KOMOV: Does that mean that the metagom loses his former ties?

LOGOVENKO: That varies. It's not as simple as you think. The most typical model of the Ludens' attitude toward man is the attitude of an experienced and very busy adult for a cute but terminally annoying kid. Then picture the relationship: Luden and his father, Luden and his best friend, Luden and his teacher...

GORBOVSKY: Luden and his girlfriend...

LOGOVENKO: It's a tragedy, Leonid Andreyevich. A real tragedy...

KOMOV: I see you take the situation to heart. Then perhaps it would be easier to stop all this? After all, it's in your hands.

LOGOVENKO: Doesn't it seem amoral to do that?

KOMOV: Doesn't it seem amoral to subject humanity to a shock like that? To create an inferiority complex in mass psychology, to give youth knowledge of the limits of its possibilities?

LOGOVENKO: That's why I came to you — to seek a way out.

KOMOV: There is only one way. You must leave Earth.

LOGOVENKO: Excuse me. Who exactly is "we"?

KOMOV: You metagoms.

LOGOVENKO: Gennady Yurevich, I repeat: in the great majority of cases, Ludens do not live on Earth. All their interests; their lives, are beyond Earth. Damn it, you don't live in bed! Only the midwives like me and the homopsychologists have permanent ties with Earth... and a few dozen of the most miserable of us, those who cannot tear themselves away from family and loved ones!

GORBOVSKY: Ah!

LOGOVENKO: What did you say?

GORBOVSKY: Nothing, nothing. I'm listening to you attentively.

KOMOV: Then you mean to say that interests of metagoms and earthlings do not coincide?

LOGOVENKO: Yes.

KOMOV: Is cooperation possible?

LOGOVENKO: In what area?

KOMOV: That's for you to say.

LOGOVENKO: I'm afraid that you cannot be of help to us. As for us... you know, there's an old joke. In our circumstances it sounds rather cruel, but I'll tell it. You can teach a bear to ride a bicycle, but will the bear derive any benefit or pleasure from it? Sorry about that. But you yourself said that our interests do not coincide. (Pause) Of course, if there were a threat to Earth and humanity, we would come to your aid without a second thought and with all our power.

KOMOV: Thank you for that at least.

(A long pause, with gurgling of liquid, glass tinkling against glass, gulps, sighs)

GORBOVSKY: Yes, this is a serious challenge to our optimism. But if you think about it, humanity has accepted more frightening challenges. And I don't understand you, Gennady. You were such a serious adherent of vertical progress! Well, here it is, vertical progress! In the purest form! Humanity, spread out on the flowering plain beneath the clear skies, has made a surge upward. Of course, not the whole crowd, but why does that upset you so? It's always been that way. And always will, probably... Humanity always went into the future with the shoots of its best representatives. And as for what Daniil Alexandrovich tells us, that he is not a man but a *Luden*, that's all terminology... You're still people and, moreover, earthlings, and you can't get away from that. It's too soon.

KOMOV: You, Leonid Andreyevich, sometimes astonish me with your lack of seriousness. It's schism! Understand, schism! And you're just blathering kindly, forgive me for saying so...

GORBOVSKY: You're so... hot-tempered, dear fellow. Well, of course it's schism! I wonder where you've seen progress without schism? Where have you seen progress without stock, without bitterness, without humiliations? Without those who move far ahead and those who stay behind?

KOMOV: Well, really! "And those who will destroy me I greet with a welcoming hymn!"

GORBOVSKY: That's not quite opposite... How above: "And those who surpass me, I see off with a welcoming hymn."

LOGOVENKO: Gennady Yurevich, permit me to try to console you. We have very serious reasons for supposing that this schism will not be the final one. Beside the third impulse in the human organism, we have discovered a fourth low-frequency one and a fifth — for now unnamed. We — even we! — cannot imagine what the initiation of those systems could bring. And we cannot imagine how much more there is in man... And more than that, Gennady Yurevich. There is a schism beginning among us! It is inevitable. Artificial evolution is a scattered process. (Pause) What can you do? There are six scientific and technological revolutions behind us, two technological counterrevolutions, two gnoseological crises — you

come to evolution willy-nilly...

GORBOVSKY: Precisely. If we sat around quietly like the Tagorians or Leonidians, we'd know no sorrow. Going into technology was our own choice.

KOMOV: All right, all right. But just what is a metagom, in fact? What are his goals, Daniil Alexandrovich? His stimuli? Interest? Or is that a secret?

LOGOVENKO: No secrets.

(the phonogram ends here. All the rest - 34 minutes 11 seconds been erased.)

15/05/99 M. Kammerer

[End of Document 22.]

I'm ashamed to admit it but I spent the last few days in a state bordering on euphoria. It was as if an unbearable physical strain had ceased. Probably Sisyphus experienced something similar when the rock finally leaped out of his hands, and he had the blessed relief of sitting at the top of the mountain before starting all over.

Every earthling experienced the Big Revelation in his own way. But I swear that I had it worse than anyone else.

I've reread everything I had written, and I now fear that my feelings in relation to the Big Revelation could be misunderstood. It may create the impression that I was afraid for the fate of mankind. Naturally, there were fears — for back then I knew absolutely nothing about Ludens except for the fact that they existed. So there was fear. And there were brief howls of panic: "That's it, the game is over!" And a feeling of a catastrophically sharp turn, when the wheel is going to fly out of your hands and you're going to fly off into nowhere, helpless like a savage during an earthquake. But above all this prevailed the humiliating awareness of my total professional failure. We missed the boat. Blew it. Flopped. Useless dilettantes...

And then the whole wave receded. And not because Logovenko had convinced me of anything or made me believe him. It was something else.

I had gotten used to the feeling of professional failure over the month and a half. ("Pangs of conscience are tolerable" is one of the

small unpleasant discoveries you make with age.)

The wheel wasn't being pulled out of my hands anymore — I had handed it over to someone else. And now, with a kind of distance, I noted to myself that Komov was exaggerating and Leonid Andreyevich, as usual, was too certain of a happy ending for any cataclysm...

I was back in my own place, and once more I was in the thrall of my usual cares. For instance: getting a steady flow of information to those who had to make the decisions.

On the evening of the fifteenth, I received an order from Komov to act as I saw fit.

On the morning of the sixteenth, I called in Toivo Glumov. Without any explanation, I let him read the record of the conversation at Leonid's House. Amazingly, I was practically certain of success.

Why should I have had any doubts?

DOCUMENT 23:

Working Phonogram: T. Glumov and M. Kammerer

WORKING PHONOGRAM

Date: 16 May 99

INTERLOCUTORS: M. Kammerer, head of UE Department; T. Glumov, Inspector.

THEME: X X X

CONTENTS: X X X

GLUMOV: What was in the gaps?

KAMMERER: Bravo. What self-control you have, kid. When I realized what was what, I chewed the walls for a half-hour.

GLUMOV: So what was in the gaps?

KAMMERER: No one knows.

GLUMOV: What do you mean no one knows?

KAMMERER: Just that. Komov and Gorbovsky don't remember what was in the gaps. They didn't notice any gaps. And it's impossible to restore the phonogram. It's not simply erased, it's destroyed. The molecular structure is changed on the parts of the grid with gaps.

GLUMOV: A strange manner of negotiating.

KAMMERER: We'll have to get used to it.

(Pause)

GLUMOV: Well, and now what?

KAMMERER: For now we don't know enough. In general, I see only two possibilities. Either we learn to coexist with them, or we don't.

GLUMOV: There's a third possibility.

KAMMERER: Don't go off half-cocked. There is no third possibility.

GLUMOV: There is! They don't pussyfoot around us!

KAMMERER: That's not a conclusion.

GLUMOV: It is! They didn't ask permission of the World Council! They've been working secretly for many years transforming people into non-people! They're performing experiments on people! And even now, when they've been exposed, they come to negotiations and allow themselves to —

KAMMERER: (interrupting) What you want to suggest can be done either openly — and then humanity will be witness to a totally disgusting violent act — or secretly, vilely, behind the back of public opinion?

GLUMOV: (interrupting) That's all talk! The point is that humanity should not be the incubator for non-humans and certainly not a testing field for their damned experiments! Excuse me, Big Bug, but you made a mistake. You should not have let Komov or Gorbovsky know about this. You've put them in a stupid position. This is COMCON-2 business; it's fully within our competence. I think that it's still not too late. Let's take this sin upon our souls.

KAMMERER: Listen, where did you develop this xenophobia? It's not the Wanderers, not the Progressors you hate.

GLUMOV: I have the feeling that they're worse than the Progressors. They're traitors. They're parasites. Like those wasps that lay their eggs in caterpillars.

(Pause)

KAMMERER: Go on, go on. Let it all out.

GLUMOV: I won't say any more. It's useless. I've been working on this case for five years under your supervision, and I've been blundering about like a blind puppy all those years. Could you at least tell me now: where did you learn the truth? When did you realize that they're not Wanderers? Six months ago? Eight?

KAMMERER: Less than two.

GLUMOV: Doesn't matter... Several weeks ago. I can understand that you had your own considerations, and you did not want to let me in on the details; but how could you hide the fact that your objective had changed? How could you let me make a fool of myself? Before Gorbovsky and Komov... I get a chill whenever I think of it!

KAMMERER: Can't you accept that there might have been a reason for it?

GLUMOV: I can. But it doesn't make me feel any better. I don't know the reason and can't even imagine it... And I don't see that you're planning to ever tell me that reason. No, Big Bug, I've had enough. I'm not good enough to work with you. Let me go, because I'll leave anyway.

(Pause)

KAMMERER: I couldn't tell you the truth. At first I couldn't tell you the truth because I don't know what we could do with it. I don't know what to do with it now either, but now all the decisions are someone else's to make...

GLUMOV: Don't justify yourself, Big Bug.

KAMMERER: Be quiet. You won't get me mad. Do you love the truth so much? Then you'll get it. All of it.

(Pause)

KAMMERER: Then I sent you to the Institute of Eccentrics and had to wait some more —

GLUMOV: (interrupting) What does —

KAMMERER: (interrupting) I said be quiet! It's not easy to tell the truth, Toivo. Not cutting up the truth, the way young people like to do, but serving it up to someone like you... green, confident, all-knowing, and all-understanding. Be quiet and listen.

(Pause)

KAMMERER: Then I got a reply from the Institute. The answer floored me. I had thought that I was showing routine forethought, but it turned out... Listen, you just read the transcript. Didn't anything seem strange in it to you?

GLUMOV: Everything is strange in it.

KAMMERER: Come on, pay attention. Read it again, but carefully, from the very beginning, from the heading. Well?

(Pause)

GLUMOV: "Only for members of the Presidium..." What does that mean?

KAMMERER: Well? Well?

GLUMOV: You let me read a document that was top security... Why?

KAMMERER: (slowly and almost ingratiatingly) As you have noticed, there are gaps in this document. So, I'm nurturing the hope that when your time comes, out of friendship, and for the old times' sake, you'll fill those gaps in for me.

(Long pause)

KAMMERER: That's how the whole truth looks. In the part of it that concerns you. As soon as I learned that they were sorting at the Institute of Eccentrics, I sent all of you there, one after the other, on various idiotic excuses. It was simply a measure of elementary caution, understand? So as not to leave the enemy the slightest chance. To be sure... no, I still wasn't sure... To know for sure: that among my staff there were only humans...

(Pause)

KAMMERER: They have the machine there — allegedly for finding "eccentrics". They have all the visitors pass through it. Actually, the contraption looks for the so-called T-tooth of the mentogram, a.k.a. the Logovenko Impulse. If a person has a third-impulse system worth initiating, this three-pronged tooth appears in his mentogram. So, you have this tooth.

(Long pause)

GLUMOV: That's all nonsense, Big Bug.

(Pause)

GLUMOV: They're tricking you!

(Pause)

GLUMOV: It's a provocation! They're just trying to knock me out of the game! Apparently I've learned something very important, but I still don't know myself what it is, and they want to get rid of me... It's so elementary!

(Pause)

GLUMOV: You've known me since childhood! I've passed thousands of mentoscopies. I'm an ordinary human! Don't believe them, Big Bug! Who gives you your information?... No, I 'm not asking the name... Just think, who could know all that? He must be one of them himself... How can you believe him? (Shouts) I'm not the issue! I'm leaving anyway! But in just that way he can destroy COMCON without firing a single shot! Have you thought about

that?

(Pause)

GLUMOV: (in a low voice) What should I do! You've probably decided what I'm to do now...

KAMMERER: Listen. Don't be upset. Nothing terrible has happened yet. What are you shouting for as if they're creeping up on you with knives? After all, it's all in your hands! If you don't want it, nothing will change!

GLUMOV: How do you know that?

KAMMERER: I don't know anything. I know as much as you do. You've just read that thing... The third impulse is only a potential. It has to be initiated... and then that... rising from level to level begins. I'd like to see them try to do it without you wanting it!

GLUMOV: Yes. (Laughs hysterically) You sure scared me, chief!

KAMMERER: You simply weren't thinking.

GLUMOV: I'll just run oft! Let them find me! And if they do and start bothering me... tell them I don't recommend that!

KAMMERER: I doubt they'll want to talk to me.

GLUMOV: What do you mean?

KAMMERER: You see, we've no authority in their eyes. Now we have to get used to a totally new situation. We're not the ones who set the time for talks or the topic... We've lost control over events. The situation is unheard of! Here on Earth, among us, is a force — not just a force, a megaforce! And we don't know anything about it. Rather, we knew only what we're permitted to know, and that, you must agree; is almost worse than total ignorance. Not very cozy, eh? Well, I can't say anything bad about these Ludens, but I don't know anything good about them either!

(Pause)

KAMMERER: They know everything about us and we know nothing about them. It's humiliating. Every one of us privy to the situation feels humiliated... Now we have to expose two members of the World Council to keep mentoscopy — only to restore the conversation at the historic meeting at Leonid's House... And you realize of course that neither the members of the Council nor we want this mentoscopy. It humiliates us all, but what can we do.

Even though the chances of success, as you yourself must know, are less than problematic —

GLUMOV: But you have your own agents among them!

KAMMERER: Not among, near them. Among is simply a pipe dream. Most likely unattainable... Which of them would want to help us? What for? What do they care about us? Eh? Toivo!

(Long pause)

GLUMOV: No. Maxim. I don't want to. I understand, but I don't want to!

KAMMERER: Afraid?

GLUMOV: I don't know. I just don't want to. I'm a human, and I don't want to be anything else. I don't want to look down at you I don't want people I respect and love to seem like children to me. I know that you're hoping that the human will remain in me... Maybe you even have reason for hoping. But I don't want to take the risk. I don't.

(Pause)

KAMMERER: Well... in the final analysis, that's even commendable.

[End of Document 23.]

DOCUMENT 24:

Fear of being transformed into a Luden

I was certain of success. I was wrong.

I didn't know you well enough, Toivo Glumov, my boy. You seemed harder, more protected, more fanatical,. if you will.

And finally, a few words about the real goal of my memoir.

My reader familiar with the book "Five Biographies of the Century" will have guessed that the goal is to overturn the sensational hypothesis of P. Soroka and E. Braun, that Toivo Glumov, while still a Progressor on Giganda, fell into the field of vision of the Ludens and was recognized as one of their own. Allegedly, he was transformed by them, moved up to the appropriate level, and sent to me to COMCON-2 as a disinformers and misinterpreter. Allegedly, for five years he did nothing but heat up the atmosphere in COMCON against the Wanderers, interpreting every wrong step, every miscalculation, every careless act of the Ludens as a manifestation of the activity of the hated supercivilization. For five years he led us by the nose, the entire leadership of COMCON-2, and especially his chief and patron, Maxim Kammerer. And when the Ludens were exposed nevertheless, he played out one last tearjerker scene for the trusting Big Bug and dropped out of the game.

I think that any unprejudiced reader, unfamiliar with the conjectures of Soroka and Braun, who has read this far will shrug and say: "What nonsense; what a strange idea. It contradicts everything I've read." As for the prejudiced reader, the reader who knows Toivo Glumov only from Five Biographies, I can make only one recommendation: try to look. at the material dispassionately; don't sprinkle spices into the Luden problem, which has become rather bland by now.

I have no argument that the story of the Big Revelation contains many blanks, but I maintain with full responsibility that the blanks have nothing to do with Toivo Glumov. And with full responsibility I maintain that all of Soroka and Braun's clever theories are simply nonsense, yet another attempt to scratch the left ear with the right

hand from beneath the left knee.

As for the “final tearjerker scene,” there is only one thing that I regret and for which I berate myself in this day. I did not realize — old thick-skinned rhino that I am — I did not sense that I was seeing Toivo Glumov for the last time.

[End of Document 24.]

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DOCUMENT 25.

Sverdlovsk: Topol II, Apt. 9716 to M. Kammerer S. Mtbevari:

The Waves Extinguish the Wind

SVERDLOVSK, TOPOL II, Apt. 9716

TO M. KAMMERER

Big Bug!

I was visited by Logovenko today. The conversation lasted from 12:15 to 14:05. Logovenko was convincing. Essence: it's not as simple as we imagine it all. For instance: it is maintained that the period of stationary development in humanity is coming to an end, the epoch of shocks (biosocial and psychosocial) is coming, and the main goal of Ludens in retaliation to humanity is, it turns out, to be on guard (like "the catcher in the rye"). At the present time, 432 Ludens live and play on Earth and in the cosmos. I was offered the chance to become the 433rd, for which I must appear in Kharkov at the Institute of Eccentrics the day after tomorrow, May 20, at 10:00.

The enemy of the human race whispers to me that only a real idiot would refuse a chance to develop superconsciousness and power over the universe. This whisper I can quell without great effort, since I am a man who is not interested in prestige, as you well know, and cannot bear elitism in any form. I won't hide that our last conversation fell deeper into my soul than I would have liked. I do not like feeling myself a deserter. I would not have hesitated in my choice for a second, but I am absolutely certain that as soon as they turn me into a Luden, nothing (nothing!) human will remain. Admit it, deep in your heart you think the same thing.

I will not go to Kharkov. I have thought everything over these last few days. I will not go to Kharkov first of all because that would be a betrayal of Asya. Secondly, because I love my mother and honor her. Thirdly, because I love my comrades and my past. Transformation into a Luden would be the death of me. It is much worse than death, because for those who love me, I would remain alive, but unrecognizably different. Haughty, smug, self-confident.

And on top of that, eternal, probably.

Tomorrow I am going off after Asya to Pandora.

Farewell, and I wish you luck.

Yours, T. Glumov 18 May 99

REPORT COMCON-2 No.086/99 Urals-North

Date: 14 November 99

FROM: S. Mtbevari, Inspector

THEME: 081 "The Waves Extinguish the Wind"

CONTENTS: Conversation with T. Glumov.

According to our instructions, I am reconstructing my conversation with former inspector T. Glumov, which occurred in the middle of July of this year. Around 17 o'clock, when I was in my office, I received a videophone call, and T. Glumov's face appeared on the screen. He was merry and animated, greeting me boisterously. He had gained a little weight since the last time I had seen him. The conversation went approximately like this:

GLUMOV: Where's the chief gone to? I've been trying to reach him all day, to no avail.

I: The chief's away on business. He won't be back for a while.

GLUMOV: That's too bad. I need him desperately. I'd really like to talk to him.

I: Send a letter. They'll forward it.

GLUMOV: (after some thought) It's a long story. (I remember that phrase exactly.)

I: Then tell me what to tell him. Or how to reach you. I'll write it down.

GLUMOV: No. It is personal.

Nothing else substantial was said. Rather, I don't remember anything.

I want to stress that at the time all I knew about T. Glumov was that he had quit for personal reasons and had gone to join his wife on Pandora. That was why it did not occur to me to do the most elementary things such as recording the conversation, determining

the call line, letting the President know, and so on. I can only add that I had the impression that T. Glumov was in a room lit with natural sunlight. Apparently, at the time he was on Earth in the Eastern Hemisphere.

Sandro Mtbevari

[End of Document 25.]

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DOCUMENT 26:

M. Kammerer: Theme 060 T. Glumov, Metagom

TO THE PRESIDENT OF SECTOR URALS-NORTH OF CG-2

Date: 23 January 101

FROM: M. Kammerer, head of UE Department

THEME: 060 T. Glumov, metagom

President!

I have nothing to report. The meeting did not take place. I waited for him at Red Beach until dark He did not show up.

Of course, it would not have been difficult to go to his house and wait for him there, but I feel that would have been a tactical error. His aim is not to harass us. He simply forgets. Let's wait some more.

M. Kammerer

[End of Document 26]

DOCUMENT 27:

A Letter from the Elusive Glumov

COMCON-I TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE METAGOM
COMMISSION KOMOV, G. YU.

My Captain! I'm sending over two curious texts that have a direct bearing on the subject of your new passion.

TEXT I. (A note from T. Glumov to M. Kammerer)

Dear Big Bug!

It's all my fault. But I'm prepared to make amends. The day after tomorrow, the second, exactly at 20:00 I will definitely be home. Waiting. I guarantee good food and promise to explain everything. Even though, as I see it, there is no great urgency for that now.

TEXT II. (Letter from A. Glumova, addressed to M. Kammerer along with T. Glumov's note)

Dear Maxim!

He asked me to send this note to you. Why didn't he send it himself? Why didn't he just call you to make a date? I don't understand a thing. Lately, I don't understand him at all, even when we're talking about seemingly simple things. But I do know that he is unhappy. Like all of them. When he is with me, he's terribly bored. When he's back home, he misses me, or he wouldn't come back. He can't go on living this way, and he'll have to make a choice. I know what he will choose. lately he's been coming back less and less. I know some of his brothers who have stopped coming back completely. There's nothing more for them on Earth.

As for his invitation, naturally I will be happy to see you, but don't count on his being there. I don't.

Yours, A. Glumova

Naturally, Kammerer went to the meeting, and naturally, T. Glumov did not show up.

They are leaving, my captain. They are leaving, the miserable

ones, and leaving miserable ones behind them. Humaneness. This is serious.

This is all so different from the apocalyptic pictures we painted for each other four years ago! Remember how old Gorbovsky, smiling cleverly, groaned: "The waves extinguish the wind..." We all nodded as if understanding, and you even continued the quote with a look so significant it bordered on criticism. But did we understand him then? None of us did.

Your Athos 13/11/102

[End of Document 27.]

LAST: Glumov as an "historical fact"

Maxim!

I can't do anything. They bow and scrape apologetically before me, they assure me of total respect and sympathy, but nothing changes. They've turned Toivo into a "historical fact."

I know why Toivo is silent — he doesn't care about all this, and then where is he, in which worlds? I can guess why Asya is silent — it's horrible to say, but I think they' convinced her.

But why are you silent? You loved him, I know that, and he loved you!

M. Glumova

30 June 126

Ust-Narva

As you see, I am no longer silent, Maya Toiovovna. I have spoken. Everything that I could any and everything that I knew how to say.

Last-modified: Fri, 12 Mar 1999 21:26:47 GMT

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